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**Shiftings of the Self: Towards a Deterritorialized View of Identity and Belonging. The
Case of East and Central African-Asians in Canada**

Kim C. Matthews

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Sociology and Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

Shiftings of the Self: Towards a Deterritorialized View of Identity and Belonging. The Case of East and Central African-Asians in Canada

Kim C. Matthews

Who am I? The question of identity is formulated with particular intensity by the fifteen respondents of this study, members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora residing in Canada. The respondents are Ismaili by faith, a spiritual identity that underpins all other aspects of their identity construction. They may identify as Indian by origins, African by place of birth or upbringing, and recently as Canadian by citizenship. Some have multiple identities, they may select one or more as prime or dominant; they may change their identities depending on the circumstances. At times, the representation of their identity may be contested. Negotiating identity and identities is therefore the theme of this thesis: How people negotiate and maintain their identities, why, with what consequences, also what conflicts this may cause, both internally, and with the earlier and later generations—parents and children. They have from the very start of their existence faced challenges to their identity and sense of belonging. Born in Africa of Indian origins, they faced opposition from African governments who in some cases refused to provide citizenship. The ability of social agents to forge a sense of belonging despite resistance at the local level speaks to the value of spiritual and cultural spaces in which the construction of identity goes beyond specific localities in the effort to shape shared meanings and understanding.

DEDICATION

In Memoriam

Martin Francis Reidy PhD

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents the results of a study based in Montreal, Quebec. The aim of the study is to gain a greater understanding of how members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora reconcile the political, economic, social, cultural, and religious influences they have faced and are facing. The impacts of these forces on identity formation and maintenance, their sense of belonging and the meaning of home are explored. The construction of identity is a multifaceted endeavour that is in a constant state of renewal and negotiation. Our own sense of belonging in society is dependent upon how we identify ourselves and others, and in turn how others identify us. The issues of identity and belonging are particularly salient for communities of a diaspora not least because for many members migration has been or is a way of life. The process of settling in new environments heightens the likelihood of encounters with other cultures. What are the outcomes for members of a diaspora? Is their ethnic identity weakened by the introduction of new cultural practices? Or is it strengthened in response to a perceived or real threat? If it is strengthened, in what forms or practices does this manifest? Is there a convergence of identity? If so, how is this convergent identity manifested? Or perhaps identity is fluid and adaptable, more than one identity-multiple identities encapsulating the numerous and diverse experiences for members of a diaspora. The case for multiple identities is quite enticing as it presents the possibility for flexibility and adaptation to new environments. Having lived in many countries, and having links social, political,

cultural, economic and imagined to different sites introduces the questions of where one belongs and where is home? Far from being self-evident, the questions of identity, belonging and home require research and analysis in order to reach a greater understanding of diaspora communities.

The following is based on a study of fifteen respondents, informal semi-structured interviews with East and Central African-Asians residing in Toronto and Montreal, were conducted in Montreal. I am interested in their migration history as well as that of their parents. This is in order to assess the different countries and cultures they may have been exposed to. The relationship between birthplace and identity is also explored to gain insight into the role the country of birth plays in identity construction and representation especially under circumstances when one is a minority, and through political, social, and economic pressures migration becomes necessary. Issues revolving around 'host' country and belonging, and the impact upon cultural practices are also considered. Questions are posed regarding the adaptation to new ways of living one's life in new locales, maintaining ones sense of identity and culture in the process albeit sometimes in new forms. Finally, the issue of 'home' is investigated: its symbolic meaning, home as a place of birth, country of origin, where family resides, where one has lived the longest, as well as the shifting of home at different points in one's life.

I use this thesis to investigate certain debates regarding the nature of identity, belonging, and home. The respondents I have selected are Ismaili Muslims, a group which, to date, have rarely been studied. Their responses are textual and illustrative of their experiences

as members of a diaspora, and lend well to a broader discussion of identity and belonging. It will become clear that though their religious background was not the primary focus of the investigation, adherence to the Ismaili faith is an essential component of their lives, sense of belonging and identity.

In the following chapter I will explore salient theories regarding identity and belonging and how they relate to my study. In chapter III the methodological parameters will be outlined and explained. Chapter IV provides a brief background on the history of the Ismaili faith, migration history from India to Africa, as well as information regarding the respondents including age, place of birth, languages spoken and migratory history. Chapter V examines the concept of multiple identity, as well as the implications of multiple identity on identity formation, negotiation, and maintenance. The situational nature of identity construction and representation is also explored. The geo-physical and socio-cultural meanings of Indian are considered. The role experiences in Africa have had on the respondents is presented. Finally, issues concerning contested identity are outlined. Chapter VI presents the integral place religion has in the lives of the respondents from a spiritual and secular perspective. The notion of mosques as cultural sites is introduced. The concept of home is investigated as it relates to the respondents. Lastly, issues regarding diaspora existence are broached with a suggestion that such experiences may lead to superior adaptive qualities. Concluding remarks and suggestions for future research are provided in chapter VII.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Identity Construction

Identity construction does not occur in a vacuum. Identities are forged in the presence of others. The perception of others' opinions plays an essential role in identity formation and maintenance. I am reminded here of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the excess of seeing: "This ever-present *excess* of my seeing, knowing, and possessing in relation to any other human beings is founded in the uniqueness and irreplaceability of my place in the world." (1990:23) Here, Bakhtin is referring to the limited scope of vision both figuratively, and literally, that each and every human being is subject to. There is a part of oneself one may never see in the fullest sense. Only someone outside of us is capable of completing the picture. Likewise, each human being has their own specific way of seeing the world and those around them. The excess of seeing is our ability to see *in excess* of the one we are looking at. Figuratively, seeing relates to perceiving the actions of others from a perspective that is outside of them. How one believes one comes across in social situations usually is not the same as the way others perceive us. We use our impressions of what we think others will think or see to frame our actions and when possible, our outward appearance. The excess of seeing in this respect relates to the role that others play in the completion of the formation of our identities. Without the excess of seeing that we are aware that others have, not least because we share the same ability, we would not have a *mirror* in which to judge, censure, and know ourselves. It is important

to note that the *excess of seeing* is taking place in social situations that are fraught with norms, boundaries and socio-political power structures. When dealing with a diaspora the concept of the *excess of seeing* takes on new meaning. The members of the diaspora population I am dealing with have lived in numerous countries; they have lived their lives in locations that are, at times, divorced from their sense of self. The numbers and types of people that they have come into contact with inevitably outnumber those that someone born, raised and lived in one locale would ever need to face. How does one negotiate one's sense of identity across such numerous conditions? Is identity strengthened under such circumstances or is it a source of angst? So when I ask how did you identify yourself in Africa, Canada, India, Pakistan, America I inevitably must inquire, how did they (the Other) identify you? This is important not so much for how members of the diaspora were identified, but rather their own perception of the opinions of others. This has a great impact on their own sense of identity, how they describe it and the strategies they employ to forge a sense of belonging. The multiple localities that my respondents have lived in, the numerous cultures to which they have been exposed, lends salience to their ability to construct and reconstruct their identity.

On a more practical level, how others view us is very much dependent on where they stand. Power permeates all social interactions; identity construction is no exception. Stuart Hall elaborates on the role of the Other in a manner that recognises the role of power in identity:

This is the other that belongs inside one. This is the other that one can only know from the place from which one stands. This is the self as it is inscribed in the gaze of the other. And this notion which breaks down the boundaries, between outside and inside, between those who belong and those who do not, between those whose histories they have depended on but whose histories cannot be spoken.

(1991:48)

Who we are in a socio-political sense is dependent on how we are defined by those in positions of power. Identity is, in part, imposed. This is not to say that social agents do not mediate their sense of self with 'the gaze of the other'. It is through mediation that identity is formed, maintained, and negotiated. A key to this mediation is the sense of belonging, which is intimately related to our sense of self, the reactions of others, and where we are 'told' our 'place' is. "In short, the spatiality of the diaspora is the ground on which momentary and ever-shifting lines are drawn between inside and outside, oppressor and oppressed, the same and other."(Keith and Pile, 1993:18) The lines are not only a distinction but are spaces around which *arbitrary closure* occurs within hierarchies of power. Each form or space of identity has within it its own sources of power, and alternately sources of weakness. Social agents draw upon the source of identity required at given points in time; these are also context specific. It is through the claiming of such identities that a sense of belonging and community may be acquired. There are times however, that a sense of belonging is not formed. The opposition to some of my

respondents' claims for citizenship in African countries despite being born there, is a concrete example of the role of the other in our construction of self and how the exercise of power in such contexts can influence lives on a concrete level. Michel Foucault's definition of the subject encompasses some of these issues:

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others must recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or a self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to.

(1982:212)

The constant interplay between what others impose and the tendency of the social agent to conform to their sense of self brings into relief the issue of freedom. Can we say with any certainty that given the strong social pressures, some self-imposed others not, to conform, that social agents are free? That the question of whether freedom exists is even raised introduces the likelihood of its existence; otherwise what is taken away? The topic of freedom a thesis in itself, I nonetheless think it is useful to address this topic, if only briefly. One's place in all of the senses of the word plays an integral part in the degree of

freedom one enjoys. If this were not so we would not have a topic of discussion like identity construction and maintenance on the table; it would be a *fait accompli*. Robert Paine critiques the theories of Frederik Barth regarding value, utility, choice, and aggregation. I will limit this discussion to the issue of choice. Paine suggests that “Barth rests so much of his sociological theorising on constraints without having a theory of constraints.” (1982:338) What is required, according to Paine, is a causal epistemology. More to the point, he asks why social agents rest upon certain constraints rather than others. Paine’s point is well taken. Perhaps freedom of choice relates less to choice of one action over another and more to choosing the constraints that will frame one’s actions. Idi Amin Dada, the president of Uganda, arbitrarily announced that all Asians were not Ugandan, despite holding citizenship. He imposed a ‘non-Ugandan’ identity on the Asians with practical and devastating effects on their way of life. Asians were expelled from the country. Despite this occurrence, expelled Asian-Ugandans consider themselves to be Ugandan. It must be noted that these claims are made in Canada in the year 2000, while living in Uganda at the time of the crisis, they were not in a position to defend their viewpoint. Social agents are free to respond in a way that they choose within the framework of the constraints they are subjected to. In some cases such brute exercises of power can unite minorities and actually strengthen their sense of self. Outward manifestations of identity may conform to the demands of those in power, as in the case of Asian-Ugandans, while internally their sense of self continued to encompass their Ugandan-ness.

Charles Taylor's essay *The Politics of Recognition* is an insightful examination of the modern notion of identity. He argues that the politics of equal recognition, whereby there is an equalisation of rights and entitlements, is in conflict with the simultaneous politics of difference whereby everyone should be recognised for their unique identity. (1992:36)

He notes that there is a demand for due recognition in democratic society and that

...our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or a group of people may suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.

(1992:25)

When we consider Taylor's discourse it becomes apparent that the ability of the social agent to choose between constraints is tied to the sense of self. The sense of self is tied, in part, to how others recognise, or misrecognise the social agent. Taylor's argument does not take into consideration the effect that a strong sense of belonging may have when faced with misrecognition or nonrecognition. With this in mind I would like to suggest that despite being oppressed, at times by colonial governments and later African leaders, that the respondents of this study have, for the most part, managed to maintain a positive

sense of self as part of the Ismaili community. This is not to say that they have not had difficulties at times with regard to the construction of their identity, but rather that the base of their identity, above all other definers, is their membership in the Ismaili community. The values and beliefs of the Ismaili faith are a substantial part of who they are. Under their paradigm, social exclusion or misrecognition will take a toll but they have their faith to fall back on.

Homi K. Bhabha discusses the notion of hybridity whereby:

It makes possible the emergence of an “interstitial” agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies find their voice in the dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions that they occupy; the outside of the inside, the part in the whole.

(1996:58)

The process of hybrid agency applies to the respondents of this study. They have, historically, always been a minority. They have been situated by majorities as ‘different’, as ‘outsiders’. “Interstitial” agency is a way of living that provides an opportunity to place a value on who they are, a way to illustrate the various sources of knowledge they

have access to as a result of their life-experiences. Amongst their own community, it is also a way to keep parts of their identity alive, linkages to sites and cultures that are integral to their sense of self. It is through “interstitial” agency that members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora can take advantage of the many cultures they have been exposed to and a part of, a way to ‘get the best from both worlds’.

Imagined Communities

One of the ways that minority populations respond to exercises of power from majorities is through the creation of imagined communities. Benedict Anderson (1991) in his consideration of nationalist movements first presented the concept of imagined communities. Anderson examined the ways in which nationalist movements imbue categorical fictive relationships with the emotions and intimacy of a face-to-face relationship, strengthening bonds and their cause in the process. Members feel affiliated to all others in the same movement because they believe they share similar values and beliefs. The social agent has the impression that they are part of a group that shares similar hopes, dreams, and aspirations despite never having met. The main difference between Anderson’s use of the concept and the way I choose to employ it is that nationalist movements are most often in the majority, imposing their will on minorities. In the case of a diaspora, the imagined community is invoked but not to subjugate others, they are a minority; it is used rather to forge a sense of belonging. Interestingly this need becomes salient when they are faced with opposition to their presence, or simply when faced with alternate and competing cultures. Anderson discusses the importance of language: “... the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating

imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*" (1991:133) Anderson is suggesting that language is a key tool in the formation of solidarity for nationalist groups. I wish to extend this to the diaspora community I am studying. All of the respondents speak a minimum of four languages. And, as we will see later in the discussion, language is a main characteristic that they share with Indians from India, it is a characteristic that they cite as a main tie, linking them to Indians and Pakistanis. Likewise, a part of their religious community shares a dialect, Katchi, which bonds them together as Khojas or Ismailis of Indian origins. In addition, the respondents' ability to speak other languages facilitates their integration with other communities and cultures.

Imagined communities play a role in breaking free from the arbitrary classifications set forth by majorities to situate minorities. Guarnizo and Smith explore identities forged 'from below':

The process of sub-altern identity is a process of constant struggle-a struggle in which discursive communities produce narratives of narratives of belonging, resistance, or escape. In these grand narratives of personal meaning, the spaces for forming non-essentialist identities, while not entirely absent, are interstitial-i.e., they open up between such dominant discursive venues as "the nation-state," the "local community," and the "ethno-racial" community.

(Guarnizo and Smith, 1998:23)

There can be an empowering aspect to imagined communities, one that lends pride in one's culture and history. In the case of the current study, the respondents are Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims. Ismailis live in over twenty-five countries with seventy to seventy-five thousand living in Canada from various backgrounds and origins. Some of the great-grandparents of the respondents of this study converted from Hinduism to Ismailism while living in India. Migration took place soon afterwards for Africa, the pressures were economic and social, the main goal being to forge a better life. Historical narratives have been passed on through generations. The values of the religion play an important role in the lives of the respondents. The Ismaili community is both an actual community and also imagined. Actual in terms of their interactions with fellow Ismailis here in Canada, and imagined through their solidarity with Ismailis from all over the world. The power of this imagined community is evidenced through the words of one of the respondents, Faride, born in Tanzania and currently living in Toronto: "it doesn't matter where one is in the world, we know we are not alone we can always meet with someone from our community." It is important to note that by this Faride means that regardless of whether he has met the person before, he feels they share a fundamental similarity through belonging to the same religion. It is perhaps not surprising that members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora have turned to their religion as a main source of identity construction. They have lived in many places and faced opposition, to the point of being expelled in some instances. The formation of the imagined community takes place from a young age through family stories and historical accounts. It is reinforced through the teachings of the community's beliefs and values. More importantly, in the context of the

Ismailis I interviewed the imagined community does not respond or pass judgement-it is called upon to comfort and provide a sense of belonging.

The respondents of this study had not one but two imagined communities that they called upon as part of their identity and as a source of belonging; the second being their Indian origins. Imagined communities play an integral part of identity formation and maintenance especially for diaspora communities. Identity in this framework takes on a mythical status-divorced in many ways from 'real' identities in 'real' places. The mythical status is not impervious to scrutiny however. There are times, at least in the case of my respondents, that imaginary slams into reality in the form of visits by members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora to India or Pakistan, or meeting Indians and Pakistanis from their respective countries in other places. At these times, the question of what it means to be Indian is raised. The meaning for members of the diaspora I am studying involves Indian as a social-cultural category, while for members of the respective countries it requires living there, or at the very least having been born there. The difference of opinion is not always resolved. I seek to establish the meanings of what being Indian entails, and how members of the diaspora I am studying reconcile challenges to their Indian identity.

Deconstructing Place and Space

Social scientists historically have tended to view place and space primarily from a geo-physical standpoint. There has been a shift in recent years towards a relational view. When we are dealing with a diaspora a cartographic view does not permit a thorough

analysis of their lives. They have relationships, life histories and memories that transcend numerous boundaries and borders. East and Central African-Asians have from the very start of their existence faced challenges to their identity and sense of belonging. Born in Africa of Indian origins, they faced opposition from African governments who in some cases refused to provide citizenship. Interstitiality has been a defining aspect of their identity ever since. They have sometimes been defined as part of a nation they have never been, in the case of India, alternately part of states in which they have not held citizenship. The cultural practices originating from Asia were recontextualized to fuse with the African experience; migration to North America introduced further challenges for contextualization. The conceptualisation of their identity involves people, places, and histories that are extra-local and increasingly diasporic in nature. I have chosen to employ theories that deconstruct the concepts of place and space to analyse the complexities of the lives of my respondents.

Analysing the relationships between places, social agency and perceptions of spaces requires a re-thinking of place and space. Theorists concerned with the geography of identity and politics of place have suggested ways in which this might be accomplished effectively. Patricia Yaeger (1996) attributes first and foremost, deterritorialization as a key to the shift in the understanding of place and space. "...the boundaries of the physical world have shifted drastically—enforcing the need for new ways to talk about space...Confronted by the quick metamorphosis of localities into translocalities, by the unmooring of nations and people in real time and space..."(10,11) Moving from one country to another may influence the way diaspora populations describe their identity and

sense of belonging, This may have an effect on how they construct their identities, how they map out their lives, this study will attempt to examine these issues.

A geometric view of space involves viewing space as an empty area. Space as simply an empty area precludes any meaningful analysis of the effect of given spaces on social interactions. What is needed is a broader notion of space and place, a relational view where the interstices between coming and going, be it physically or mentally becomes a site of analysis. Diaspora communities are an integral part of the world-wide framework. They are well placed to serve as indicators for the changes that we may expect for the general population in the not too distant future, some might argue that we have already reached a point of accelerated movement for the general population. This may be partially true but the degree of migratory experiences of the East and Central African Asians is impressive compared with my own life and that of my peers. How has this influenced their sense of self and belonging? In what ways are the relationships they have created maintained?

The underpinning of all social relationships is spatial. Lefebvre contends that the connection between the spatial underpinning and the social relations it supports calls for analysis: "Such an analysis must imply and explain a genesis and constitute a critique of those institutions, substitutions, transpositions, metamorphorizations, anaphorizations, and so forth, that have transformed the space under consideration."(1991:404) The respondents of this study have mapped out their lives physically in terms of where they have been and abstractly through their imagination. The spaces where social relations

take place are not empty, but rather are imbued with hierarchies and power struggles. Identity is understood, mapped out and negotiated through social relations. An appreciation of identity maintenance and negotiation requires an understanding of the spaces where this takes place. More to the point, one must examine the agents' grasp of their 'place' in given social situations to evaluate how it has influenced their sense of self and belonging.

In her book Cities in a World Economy Saskia Sassen examines a transformation of space as a result of the global economy. There has been a transformation in the geography of centrality and periphery; whereas previously, developed and underdeveloped places were clearly demarcated between first and third world countries. Presently, place in the context of developed and underdeveloped is no longer divided along nation-state lines, rather the distinction may be drawn within states:

they signal that peripheralization processes are occurring inside areas that were once conceived of as "core" area-whether at the global, regional, or urban level-and alongside the sharpening of peripheralization processes, centrality has also become sharper at all three levels. The condition of being peripheral is installed in different geographic terrains depending on the prevailing economic dynamic.

(Sassen, 1994:120)

A shifting paradigm of centrality, core and periphery requires flexible conceptions of place and space in order to analyse the processes and dynamics within the global system. This is further reinforced when one considers the increased mobility of labour within the new global economy. Questions of belonging and identity are raised and need to incorporate not only where the social agent is presently situated, but also where they have come from, and where they might be going next. This is by no means to suggest that past, present and future localities are separate and discreet. Rather, each must be considered in relation to the other and be viewed in a constant or potential state of flux. Given the frequent migration of diaspora populations, the shifting of core and periphery takes on a significance that transcends the economic and permeates the social realm. I seek to establish how this may have influenced social relations for my respondents. Members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora have lived in many different countries, have been exposed to many cultural practices, and languages. Their cultural repertoire is extensive. Their varied experiences are potentially useful in terms of their ability to adapt, and to call different resources and knowledge to the fore as needed.

Hastrup and Olwig (1997) offer a strategy that encourages an understanding of identity construction in the translocal world: "By viewing place as a cultural construction that is part of the process of human life, and not as a fixed entity, we will be able to examine critically the historical context within such constructions take place. This also means that it is possible to examine the hierarchies of power within which such constructions occur and become recognised."⁽¹²⁾ Place is a cultural construction as attested by multiple readings of the same landscape. An East African-Asian returning to Kenya will have her

own set of meanings that she will impose on Kenya as a place, one that will differ markedly from other Kenyans. This is due, in part, to the cultural and social differences between the two. The meaning imparted to specific places is not finite but rather may change over time. The work of Keith and Pile (1993) is useful in the present context since they re-vision space and place to avoid: 'The myth of spatial immanence' which contends that there is a singular true reading of any specific landscape involved in the mediation of identity (6). The re-visioning suggests that that there are multiple ways to read space, and that any given landscape may be read differently by different social agents. The construction of identity is therefore derived from the actions of the social agent as they negotiate the cultures of the past with those of the present and indeed those of an imagined community.

Lefebvre (1991) suggests the creation of a theoretical unity between "the physical", "mental" and "social", fields which are usually considered separately (10,11). Lefebvre recommends examining the existence of spatial codes and their implications: "If indeed spatial codes have existed, each characterising a particular spatial/social practice, and if these codifications have been *produced* along with the space corresponding to them, then the job of theory is to elucidate their rise, their role, and their demise" (1991:17). Space is not an empty vacuum, but rather the context where social interaction occurs, affecting, and being affected by the interaction itself; space is where the mental constructs, the symbols, and the imaginary are formed, in the same interconnected manner. In order to understand the life histories of my respondents it is necessary to consider their narratives from the standpoint advocated by Lefebvre. The identities and sense of belonging that the

respondents have created have been formed on physical, social, and mental realms. That a physical site persuades a physical sense of recognition and then summons memories and a sense of belonging and kinship with others is evidence of the unity of the three fields as suggested by Lefebvre.

A Diaspora

Diasporas usually presuppose longer distances and a separation more like exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future. Diasporas also connect multiple communities of a dispersed population. Systematic border crossings may be part of this interconnection, but multi-local diaspora cultures are not necessarily defined by a specific geopolitical boundary.

(Clifford, 1994:304)

The members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora fit with Clifford's distinction of 'multi-local diaspora cultures'. Many invoke India as the site of their common culture, as a social category. The inherent socio-political, cultural and historical elements of India represent the base of their identity, as it were, the label that they embrace, it represents the source of the culture and practices of their upbringing; *despite not being raised there*. For certain diaspora populations the place of birth is not necessarily synonymous with origins. East and Central African-Asians are not defined by a geo-physical boundary though India is nonetheless invoked as the site of their culture and beliefs. "So instead, the diaspora is an invocation of communal space that is

simultaneously inside and outside the West.”(Keith and Pile 1993:18) This explanation is most definitely applicable, outside of the West as part of an imagined community as well as within the West as part of western society.

East and Central African-Asians have lived in and adapted to many different locales, have connections that span the globe, they may also be considered consequently as transmigrants, though not in the way generally described in the literature. Basch et al define transmigrants as:

...the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement...

Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states.

(1994:7)

Origin is a complicated notion for East and Central African-Asians. To claim a society of origin would literally be to claim a linkage with a society that no longer exists as most have left Africa. When India is invoked, it is invoked as an imagined community. With this in mind, social relations do not necessarily span between societies of origin and settlement. This is not to say that such linkages do not exist. On the contrary, there are linkages that span the globe and include numerous countries. The linkages go beyond the traditional definition to encompass many connections, and dispersed relationships,

including places in which they may have never lived, or visited. By this I mean to suggest that India for example is invoked as a source of one's origins. The respondents feel a link to all Indians regardless of where they are from. This becomes clear when we consider what being Indian means to members of the Central and East African-Asian diaspora. The meaning is explored, it is not taken for granted that it refers to being a citizen of India. What being Indian represents on an abstract and cultural level is examined in this study. The connections that the respondents may have can include colonial countries as the source of their educational training, and as the country of origin of the group they preferred to align themselves with in Africa. Finally, when one considers imagined communities, the connections are mapped out in space, joining the seemingly complex and separate points of reference. It is when we consider the imagined community as a source of belonging that the power of the imaginary is revealed, these matters were considered in depth through the course of the research.

Parminder Bhachu discusses patterns of migration that involve series of moves that are illustrative of transmigrant practices: "...they constitute a transnational people with established international, national, and local connections. These features are critical to the reproduction of their cultural bases and ethnicities and to their engagement with the economies and polities of their countries of settlement." (1996:290). Transmigrants recreate their communities at the local level through connections at the international, national and local levels. The respondents of this study describe communities in Africa that are very similar to those they are now a part of in Canada. Cultural and religious practices are renegotiated and maintained as they move to new locales.

Place, under the ideological precept of the translocal, takes on significance from a physical, and imaginary perspective. “....place only persuades us because it is made out of reiterated stories and objects that produce a constant, pervasive sense of locatability.”(Yaeger, 1996:20) Although Yaeger does not elaborate on this point, the sense of locatability may be gleaned not only from the presence of recognisable referents, but from their absence. The absence of familiar referents is contrasted to the known and remembered referents of a previous locale. Yet the skills and knowledge acquired in one place are adapted accordingly to meet the needs of a new locale. The result may be professional migrants, in the case of my respondents; negotiating their lives in ways that maximises the sum of their experiences and linkages. This is not to suggest that all members of a diaspora enjoy the ability to move freely and adapt with ease. There may be a certain degree of confidence gleaned by moving and adapting to numerous environments. I seek to examine the respondents’ thoughts regarding their ability to adapt to new locales and the rationale for their success. It appears that in the case of the respondents to this study they have all adapted well to each country they have lived in, and this translates into a belief that they can adapt no matter where they go. The way that they have managed to successfully move from place to place, maintaining a sense of belonging and of self in the process will be considered. Their identity is linked in part to the manner that they live their lives according to customs and rituals originating from another distinct location. Maintaining one’s sense of self despite where one has been, is presently, and is likely to go, requires negotiation. One’s sense of self is embedded in daily practices and rituals.

Identity in the context of transmigrants becomes plural, and context specific. It is the experiences of displacement, re-territorialization, leaving, returning, settling and moving on that introduces alternate, or similar cultural practices to members of the diaspora. One can never truly return to the original way of 'doing'. Even the expressed act of attempting to maintain practices in a 'traditional' fashion speaks to the recognition that alternate forms exist, and consequently the social agent lives these practices through different lenses from before. Perceptions change and invariably the meanings of cultural practices shift and evolve even if the shift is the recognition of the attempt to maintain 'the old ways'. This is not to say that the resulting practices do not meet the psycho-social needs of the social agent, on the contrary, culturally reflexive practices help to reinscribe identity as part of a larger community even if, or perhaps especially if these communities are dispersed.

Cultural Sites

Karen Fog Olwig discusses the effects of "...a world where moving and dwelling are in constant interplay...The displaced do not experience temporary absences only to be confirmed in the well-ordered structure of normal life. There is a more or less permanent experience of not being in-situ, as they negotiate a diversity of experiences in a deterritorialized world." (1997:34) East and Central African-Asians of the diaspora are negotiating a variety of experiences in a deterritorialized world. Their ability to negotiate the influences they are subjected to is examined in this study. The ability of social agents to forge a sense of belonging despite resistance at the local level speaks to the value of spiritual and cultural spaces in which the construction of identity goes beyond specific

localities in the effort to shape shared meanings and understanding. Resistance may take the form of stereotyping and exclusion from 'mainstream' society. Reaction to exclusionary practices takes the form of stronger bonds with members of one's own community. Cultural sites provide a place to nurture relationships and forge a sense of belonging.

Important frameworks of life and sources of identification should rather be sought in the cultural sites which have emerged in the interstices between the local and global conditions of life. These sites encompass and embody the multiple and contradictory spheres of life in which people are involved today.

(1997:35)

Cultural sites provide a space to 'return' to one's roots at least in cognitive fashion. Meeting others with similar backgrounds; participating in customs and rituals that reinscribe identity is self-affirming and is a key component in community building. One such type of cultural site are mosques; in the case of my respondents, not only as a place of worship but as a site where cultural and religious practices are substantiated. Truly interstitial in nature, mosques are found world-wide. Identifying oneself with a specific religion creates bonds that transcend geo-physical boundaries. Religious activities at mosques are very similar regardless of where the mosque is situated. It is a site where transmigrants may feel they belong even if the welcome does not extend past the front doors. The underlining of difference is not imposed from the outside in this instance, it is

self-imposed as a way of forging a sense of belonging. The sense of belonging is not necessarily linked to a place; rather it may be gleaned from cultural, religious or even linguistic lines. There is a reliance on such cultural sites for a sense of belonging; it is not surprising therefore that religion plays a defining role in how transmigrants from the Ismaili faith in this study tended to define themselves. Cultural sites provide a location for transmigrants to feel 'at home'

Home Reconceptualized

Home in a conventional sense is a place of origin; as discussed earlier origin is in itself ambiguous for transmigrants. Origin may not be related to where one was born, or where one was raised but rather linked with the site of one's cultural origins despite not necessarily having any actual physical connections. Home in a conventional sense needs to be refashioned to account for these discrepancies. Rapport and Dawson suggest:

Perhaps it is part-and-parcel of an appreciation of the way that individuals live in movement, transition and transgression, that its conceptualization, as 'home', is to be similarly paradoxical and transgressive. 'Home' we suggest as a working definition, 'is where one best knows oneself' - where 'best' means 'most', even if not always 'happiest'. Here in sum, is an ambiguous and fluid but yet ubiquitous notion, apposite for charting of the ambiguities and fluidities, the migrancies and paradoxes, of identity in the world today.

(1998:9)

Rapport and Dawson's definition of home provides flexibility; home is not necessarily a place, or singular. Home in their sense is changeable. The complexity of diaspora existence is given space to play out with this definition. Their definition contrasts that of Basch et al. "Transmigrants use the word "home" for their society of origin, even when they clearly have made a home in their country of settlement" (1994:7) Among the members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora neither Africa nor India are considered home. Many have never lived in India, all have resided in Africa, in some instances holding citizenship, yet now may reside in almost every country in the world. It is important to note that the migratory practices of the diaspora are not new but are rather a continuation of a way of life in Africa where internal and external migration were a part of day-to-day living. Often, members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora were considered as foreigners in their country of birth. This led to innovative ways to define their identity and role in society. Home in this context may be imagined in terms of an imagined community, or as part of a larger community of 'foreigners' in the same land. A key here is that home is not singular.

Home as where "one best knows oneself" is a better formulation, specifically in reference to transnationals. An essential component to this explanation is that where one best knows oneself is entwined with where one is known by others. The relevance of this statement is particularly important for transnationals. The relationships that transnationals are involved in span many borders-arguably from a social perspective, the relations are in fact sans frontiers. Their linkages and relationships go beyond geo-physical boundaries and include social ties to people they may never have met, yet they believe that they

share similar values and customs through membership in the same religion. This being the case, knowing oneself is not wrapped neatly in the geophysical boundaries of a nation-state, nor under the umbrella of culture–identity is plural and evolving in many cases formed in an act of opposition to dominant alternatives. We are led to the idea that one’s identity is context specific; who and what we are surrounded by will have a profound effect on our sense of self. I suggest that precisely because transnationals have experienced rupture from a geophysically based self–definition theirs are identities that promote solidarity across many boundaries; affording flexibility and superior adaptation qualities in the process. One’s identity is not linked to an unstable ‘homeland’ but may be fashioned along religious, cultural or linguistic lines as the need arises. I intend to examine these possibilities. Frequent displacement and settlement leads to a stronger sense of identity through an introduction to alternate, and at times, oppressive cultures. Likewise repeated and successful transitions leads to greater self-confidence. With each move new challenges are met, and new skills developed. The relationships formed and maintained along the trajectory serve to provide a substantial network of associations that encourage social, cultural, religious and economic ties; ties that a non-migrant simply does not have the opportunity to cultivate.

Diaspora Experience as Evolutionary

The rapidity of change in the world brings into relief the nature of identity formation and maintenance—what was once taken for granted now needs to be underlined and celebrated. The disembedding of cultural and religious practices may be linked to time space compression. “Time-space compression involves a shortening of time and a ‘shrinking’ of space—progressively, the time taken to do things reduces and this in turn reduces the experiential distance between different points in space.” (Waters, 1995:55) “The liberation of time and space is an entirely modernizing development because it allows the stable organization of human activity across vast temporal and spatial distances”. (Waters, 1995:49) Time-space compression is the precursor to disembedding, or ‘lifting out’ of social relations and events from their immediate or local context to the world in general.

Malcolm Waters succinctly summarises the consequence of the process of disembedding: “Each of these disembedding mechanisms implies an attitude of trust, that is, that people have confidence in the value of money and in the accuracy of expertise that is produced by non-present others. Modernity therefore involves both high trust and high risk.”(1995:49) Time-space compression brings about “...the intersection of presence and absence, the interlacing of social events and social relations ‘at distance’ with local contextualities.”(Giddens, 1991:21) The transmission of knowledge and events across the globe has resulted in heightened reflexivity. Giddens defines reflexivity specific to modernity as “ ...the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge.”

(1991:20) This results in the chronic reformulation of expert systems, and the way in which the individual relates to, and exists in the world. At first glance it might appear that reflexivity would give humankind more control over their lives. Giddens makes the case however, that rather than enhancing security, the constant reflexivity characteristic of modernity actually creates less control, and therefore encourages insecurity. "The integral relation between modernity and radical doubt is an issue which, once exposed to view, is not only disturbing to philosophers but is existentially troubling for ordinary individuals."(Giddens, 1991:21) While Giddens suggests that the modern social agent faces increased reflexivity and existential insecurity, this is not a new phenomenon. For members of a diaspora, existential insecurity is an obstacle that is faced at each juncture of their migratory pattern. Through frequent exposure to and negotiation with many cultures, languages, political and economic systems members of the diaspora I am studying are possibly better placed to deal with the challenges of the world today and tomorrow. I will attempt to explore this possibility through an examination of their adaptive capabilities to date, and their willingness to re-locate. I will also consider the maintenance, and the evolution of cultural and religious practices in Canada, that originated from India and Africa.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Goal

The goal of the present study is to gain insight into identity construction, maintenance, negotiation, and representation of East and Central African–Asians of the diaspora. There is an emphasis on the role of religion, cultural origins, birthplace, and country of residence to reach a greater understanding of how members of the diaspora forge and maintain a sense of belonging in different locales. The meaning of ‘home’ for members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora is also explored. There are many ways I might have approached the research. I chose to conduct fifteen informal semi-structured interviews of one to two hours duration with East and Central African-Asians of the diaspora. Nine of the interviewees are female, six male. Twelve of the respondents are originally from East Africa, while three are from Central Africa. Interviews were conducted in Quebec. The interviews were in-depth and qualitative. The advantage of this style of interview is that it encouraged a free-flow of thoughts on the part of the respondent and facilitated a greater understanding of the diaspora experience in the everyday lives of members of the community. The interview style attempted to encourage open discussion through participatory listening.

Interview Strategy

Interviews were tape recorded with the permission of respondents, then transcribed. All of the respondents speak a minimum of four languages. The respondents from Central Africa were educated in French, during their interview they responded in French and, at times, in English. Their ability to switch from English to French was impressive. I translated French sections into English as part of the transcription process. None of the interviewees objected to the interview being recorded. A pilot test of the interview schedule (Appendix I) took place with a colleague of Indian descent. Interview transcripts were examined with a view to noting patterns in responses and comments. The process of data gathering was reflexive, changes, additions to the interview schedule occurred based on previous responses. This was done in an attempt to generate a more comprehensive understanding of those under study and to take advantage of the flexibility afforded by the interviewing methods employed. Patterns of responses were identified in an attempt to generate conclusions/theories. The interview schedule was modified in an attempt to validate or refute preliminary conclusions. The patterns that emerged were considered with respect to the initial hypotheses set forth at the start of the project.

Recruitment Strategies and Rationale

Respondents were recruited initially through a friend from the East and Central African-Asian community in Montreal. Criteria for inclusion in the study included: being born in East or Central Africa of Indian descent, adherence to the Ismaili faith and residence in Canada. After each interview I asked respondents if they might be able to suggest other

potential interviewees. I requested that the interviewee contact other potential respondents on my behalf in order to increase the likelihood of cooperation. Members of the community tend to socialise with members of their own faith. A few close friends that I have within the community suggested that they would be more likely to recruit successfully on my behalf as they are trusted.

Advantages of the Research Design

From the outset it must be made clear that my goal was not to produce results that could be generalised to the greater population of the diaspora. I sought to glean in-depth knowledge of the individuals of the study through listening to their stories; producing data that is more in line with case studies. These are valuable in their own right as a part of a pilot study that can generate themes and issues that might be explored across a larger population at a later time. The complex nature of the issues I am exploring can not be effectively studied with closed-ended questionnaires. The respondents' narratives are illuminating, they provide an in-depth look at their sense of self and their interpretation of their life history. Their stories are related in an open and candid fashion. Paul Ricoeur's notion of 'narrative identity' is what this study has tried to elicit. He suggests: "...it is possible to apply to our self-understanding the play of sedimentation and innovation which we saw in every tradition. In the same way, we never cease to reinterpret the narrative identity that constitutes us, in the light of narratives proposed to us by our culture." (1991:32). The study is attempting to gain insight into the narrative identity of the respondents, and how they negotiate their identity and sense of belonging across physical, social and cultural boundaries. Many reported having learned a great deal about

themselves through the interview process. It should be noted however, that though some respondents suggested that they had not given much thought to the issues brought forth in the interview, the depth and detail with which respondents have answered questions suggests that they have considered these issues before. Some noted that they had thought about identity issues specifically when they arrived in Canada. Most of the respondents have been living in Canada for the past twenty-five years. It is possible that they considered the issues of identity and belonging in their first few years in Canada, but now are settled to the point that the issues are no longer as salient. Because the respondents are part of a diaspora, the physical, social and cultural boundaries they have transversed are numerous. Each new site provides an opportunity to re-think who they are and to forge a sense of belonging. Their Indian backgrounds bring a cultural aspect into the equation that is in many ways divorced from a physical location. The intricacies of this reality require non-bounded discussions to explore. Asking open-ended questions, is the most successful method for encouraging open and free-flowing dialogue, even with the most guarded of respondents.

Disadvantages of the Research Design

The community I am studying is very adept at adapting to new environments, and 'reading' people. They are also likely to be concerned with the image that not only they portray but how their responses reflect upon the community as a whole. The risk was that the responses will be those that shed a positive light on the individual (social desirability effect), rather than the true thoughts and reflections of the interviewee. The use of open-ended questions hopefully encouraged the respondents to speak freely with a greater

likelihood of open expression as their answers progressed. The findings of the study may not be generalised to the diaspora community as a whole; because of the limited sample size. Given the fact that this was not the initial goal of the study this is not necessarily a disadvantage but rather an observation.

The fact that the interview schedule was modified along the course of the study resulted in some respondents being asked questions that others were not. The lack of uniformity in questioning may have resulted in missing themes in some interviews. Again, as the findings are meant to be useful more in the sense of a case study for each respondent, the questions asked are valuable for each case in an individualised sense.

The method of recruiting respondents is not ideal, but it was the only way that I could proceed. The problem lies in the fact that I was introduced exclusively to members of the community that my friends felt were appropriate. There is a subtle problem in that they may have chose respondents that they felt would portray the community in a good light. I am however exploring identity and belonging, not Ismailism per se, so the impact on my study is lessened

Ethical Concerns

The community I intended to study is very close-knit. Outsiders are viewed with a certain degree of apprehension. I am fortunate to have access to this group of people and did not want to do anything that might erode their trust. I had to be very discreet, and respectful of the confidentiality of my respondents. This applied not only when seeking respondents

but critically during the write up of the research. All of the respondents of the study reported being active in community and religious events. They are part of a larger number of Khoja Ismailis who immigrated to Canada at approximately the same time in the late sixties and early seventies from East and Central Africa. There is a possibility that fellow Khojas could recognise the life-stories of the respondents, as they were a community in East and Central Africa. I have attempted to protect the identity of the respondents in the writing of the report by changing their names and sketching their migrations in a generalised fashion.

CHAPTER IV

BACKGROUND

Ismailism

All of the respondents in this study are Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims. Farhad Daftary is an expert on Ismaili studies. In his books The Ismailis: Their history and doctrines (1990) and A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community (1998), he chronicles the history of Ismailism. I have selected passages from his books to provide a brief background on Ismailism for the reader.

The origins of Sunnism and Shiism, the two main divisions of Islam, may be traced to the crisis of succession faced by the nascent Muslim community following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, though the doctrinal bases of these divisions developed gradually in the course of several centuries. In time, Shia Islam, the minoritarian view, became subdivided into different groups, many of which proved short-lived. But Imami Shiism, providing the common early heritage for several Shia sects, notably the Twelvers and the Ismailis, was a major exception.

The Ismailis have had a long and eventful history. In mediaeval times, they twice established states of their own and played important parts for relatively long periods on the historical stage of the Muslim world. During the second century of their history, the Ismailis founded the first Shia

caliphate under the Fatimid caliph-imams. They also made important contributions to Islamic thought and culture during the Fatimid period. Later, after a schism that split Ismailism into two major Nizari and Mustalian branches, the Nizari leaders succeeded in founding a cohesive state, with numerous mountain strongholds and scattered territories stretching from eastern Persia to Syria. The Nizari state collapsed only under the onslaught of all-conquering Mongols. Thereafter, the Ismailis never regained any political prominence and survived in many lands as a minor Shia Muslim sect. By the second half of the eighteenth century, however, the spiritual leaders or imams of the Nizari majority came out of their obscurity and actively participated in certain political events in Persia and, then, in British India; later they acquired international prominence under their hereditary title of Agha Khan (Aga Khan).

(Daftary, 1990: xv-xvi)

In the 1840s, the seat of the Nizari Ismaili imamat was transferred from Persia to India, initiating the modern period in the history of the Nizari community. Benefiting from the modernising policies and the elaborate network of institutions established by the last Aga Khan, the Nizaris have emerged as an educated and prosperous community. Numbering several millions, the Nizari Ismaili Muslims are currently scattered in more than twenty-five countries of Asia, Africa, Europe and North America.

(Daftary, 1998:4)

Migration History

In the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Ismailis from the Indian sub-continent migrated to East Africa in significant numbers. During the same period, Asians were migrating to Mauritius, West Indies, and Natal and Fiji as indentured laborers (Carter, 1996:19). A main difference was that Ismailis migrating to East Africa did so as entrepreneurs. Of the fifteen respondents of this study, ten have great-grandparents, grandparents or parents who were originally from Sind in Pakistan and the Gujarat region of India. They migrated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in search of new economic opportunities. One of the respondents recalled how his grandfather had lied about his age in order to be allowed to make the journey to Africa alone. Many settled in the coastal towns of Dar es Salaam and Tanga, Tanzania. Some settled in Zanzibar and others in Kisumu, Kenya. Of the respondents born in Central Africa, their parents moved inland from coastal towns in search of new economic opportunities and challenges.

In his book Asians in East Africa (1963), George Delf discusses the religious divisions of Indian settlers in East Africa during the early sixties. He notes that Hindus made up two thirds of the Indian population, while Muslims comprised of one third in Kenya and Uganda. In Tanganyika Muslims outnumbered Hindus, though he does not provide specific statistics. (1963:5). Delf goes on to explain that Ismaili Khojas, one of three Shia sects, predominated in East Africa in comparison with the two other Shia sects: the Ithna'ashri and the Bohra. He provides a brief description of the history of Ismaili Khojas: "The Ismaili Khojas were originally Hindu traders living in the upper Sind area

of north-west India. The word 'Khoja' means honourable disciple, and the first conversions are said to have taken place in the twelfth century." (1963:6)

The Ismaili Khojas in East Africa were, for the most part, business people. They were very prosperous. Delf notes: "Possibly more than any other Indian group in East Africa, the Ismaili Khojas produce an increasing number of well-educated young men and women who fit easily into a modern society."(1963:6) The reports of my respondents from East Africa support this viewpoint. Education was a main priority. When possible, they were sent to western countries for their studies.

The social and economic organisation of East and Central Africa was based on a colonial tripartite system. The black Africans held the lowest position in the hierarchy, followed by the African-Asian entrepreneurs, and the colonists at the helm. Under this arrangement, the political, economic and legal framework was set up in a fashion that offered a certain degree of protection for East African-Asians. They were provided an economic and legal environment that lent legitimacy to their entrepreneurial pursuits. Consequently, African-Asians enjoyed a certain degree of prestige and comfort under colonial rule. With the advent of independence in the early sixties, the colonial legal system no longer supported Asian traders. By the early 1970s, pressures on the Asian community by African government leaders intensified. In Zaire, under the leadership of Mobutu Sese Seko, a policy of 'Zairisation', or 'Zaire for the Zairois' was instituted. Nationalisation of businesses and property took place. There were informal and formal pressures for the Asians to leave their African homes. Respondents related stories of

relatives being picked up by security forces and held without charge. Citizenship papers and travel documents of one respondent were seized and destroyed. The demand for expulsion of all 'non-Ugandans' from Uganda by Idi Amin Dada was an overt and formal pressure that African-Asians could not ignore. Four of the respondents of this study were expelled from Uganda in 1972 and sought refugee status in Canada. The events in Uganda resulted in African-Asians in other areas of East Africa and Central Africa re-thinking their futures. In the late sixties and early seventies there was mass migration from Africa to western countries by African-Asians. Some of the respondents of this study fled their homes, leaving many of their belongings behind. Many tell stories of black Africans showing up at their place of business, with official state documents giving the title of the business to the bearer. Asians were expected to stay on as employees in order to train incumbents. It was under such conditions, of formal and informal pressures, that the respondents of this study left Africa for the West.

Canada was selected as a destination for numerous reasons. The spiritual leaders of their Ismaili community recommended Canada as a safe, democratic country where they could practice their religion without persecution. Canada was also accepting immigrants at the time. In the case of the Ugandans who took part in the study, they were accepted as refugees. One respondent's parents had the option of migrating to England, as they held British citizenship, but refused as they felt animosity towards the British for their colonial past.

Respondents' Background

The names of the respondents have been changed for purposes of this report. Fifteen respondents took part in this study; six males Iqbal, Imran, Faride, Moez, Nader, and Zul; nine females Amina, Arzina, Laila, Parveen, Faori, Zeitune, Shirin, Alta and Anissa. Arzina forty-four, Faori forty-three, and Shirin forty-eight were all born in Bujumbura Burundi Central Africa. Arzina moved to Zaire with her parents at the age of two so her parents could explore economic possibilities. In 1973 at the age of eighteen she and her family migrated to Canada where they were sponsored by a relative in British Columbia where they stayed for one month. She and her Mother then migrated to Montreal where she has lived since. Arzina speaks Gujarati, Swahili, and Katchi dialect of Gujarati, English and French. Shirin was born in Bujumbura Burundi she migrated to Zaire with her family at the age of six and was sent to Belgium to study at age eight. Once her studies were completed at age fourteen she returned to her family in Zaire, and they migrated to Canada when she was twenty-one. She currently lives in Montreal. Shirin speaks 7 languages, Swahili, Lingalla, Katchi, Gujarati, Urdu, English, and French. Faori was also born in Burundi, and moved to Zaire with her parents at age seven. Faori studied for seven years in Belgium then returned to Zaire. In 1973 she migrated to Canada with her family. She lived briefly in France, and returned to Canada where she has lived for the past twenty-six years. Faori speaks 8 languages, Swahili, Lingalla, Katchi, Gujarati, Urdu, English, French and Spanish. There are similar rationales for the migration patterns of these three respondents. There were political and economic pressures in Zaire in the early 1970s. It became clear to the parents of the respondents that 'non-Zairois' were no longer welcome. In addition, nationalisation policies were instituted that resulted in

family business interests being taken over without adequate remuneration. Canada was selected in part because all of the respondents had relatives in Canada and because Canada was accepting applicants from Central and East Africa at the time.

Parveen forty-seven, Laila forty-seven, Zul fifty-three, Faride forty-three, Iqbal fifty-one, and Zeitune forty-seven were born in Tanzania. Parveen was raised in Kenya and migrated to Canada at the age of twenty-one. She and her family stayed in Calgary for two years with relatives who had sponsored them. In 1976 they moved to Montreal. Parveen returned several times to Kenya to visit her parents. She speaks six languages: Swahili, Lingalla, Katchi, Gujarati, English, and French. Laila was raised in Tanzania, and went to Kenya for advanced training following her secondary schooling. She worked in Kenya for three years, the maximum length of time permitted by her work permit, then returned to Tanzania. She migrated to Canada in 1980. Laila is proficient in six languages, Swahili, Katchi, Gujarati, Urdu, English, and French. Zul though born in Tanzania, grew up in Kenya. He and his family moved to Uganda when he was six to pursue economic opportunities. He migrated to Canada in 1968 at the age of twenty-one. He lived and worked in Toronto, then moved to Montreal. Zul speaks eight languages, Hindi, Urdu, Katchi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Swahili, Spanish, English, and French. Faride was born in Tanzania where he completed his high school studies before coming to Canada in 1974 at the age of seventeen, with his parents. Faride speaks six languages, Gujarati, Katchi, Hindi, Swahili, English and French. Iqbal was born in Tanzania, at the age of eighteen he went to England to pursue his university studies. Following his studies, he migrated to Canada at the age of twenty-five, where he lived in Toronto for two years

before settling in Montreal. He was originally supposed to return to Tanzania, but his parents advised against this as conditions were not safe, and the prospects were not positive for a career. While studying in England, Iqbal would return to Tanzania during the holidays. He speaks six languages, Gujurati, Katchi, Hindi, Swahili, English, and French. Zeitune was born and lived in Tanzania until the age of 16 when she moved to England to pursue a degree. She returned to Tanzania during holiday time to visit her family while she was living in England. In 1974, following graduation, she migrated to Canada with her family. Like Iqbal, she originally intended to return to Tanzania but conditions precluded this choice. Zeitune has lived in Vancouver, Edmonton, and now resides in Montreal. She speaks Katchi, Gujurati, English and French.

Alta forty-seven, Amina forty-five, Imran fifty-one, Nader sixty-three, Moez fifty were born in Uganda. Alta moved to Zaire with her family at the age of twelve. At seventeen her parents sent her to the United States for her university studies. At twenty-one she moved to Montreal to pursue another degree. A few years later, she returned to Zaire with her husband and children. Her parents and in-laws were living there, and economically there appeared to be potential for success. She lived in Zaire for a short time and returned to Montreal where she currently lives and works. Alta speaks six languages, Gujurati, Katchi, Hindi, Swahili, English, and French. Amina was born and raised in Uganda. She moved to Tanzania for her high school studies then returned to Uganda. At the age of twenty-one she migrated to Canada as a refugee during the Ugandan crisis. She settled in Montreal, where she currently lives and works. Amina speaks five languages, Gujurati, Katchi, Hindi, English, and French. Imran was born and raised in Uganda. He migrated to

Canada as a refugee in 1972 at the age of twenty-three during the Ugandan crisis. Imran speaks four languages, Gujarati, Katchi, English, and French. Nader was born and raised in Uganda. His primary and secondary schooling took place in Kenya. At the age of sixteen he returned to Uganda to open a business. Nader moved frequently within East Africa for business purposes including: 1958 Kenya, 1959 Burundi, 1963 Kenya, between 1963 and 1972 he migrated between Kenya, Burundi, and Zaire finally returning to Uganda in 1971. In 1972 Nader was evacuated from Uganda as a refugee and landed in Montreal. He was sent to British Columbia, as he could not speak French. In 1979 he left British Columbia for the United States where he stayed until 1981 when he returned to Vancouver. The cost of living was very high in Vancouver so he migrated to Montreal where he currently lives and works. Nader speaks four languages Katchi, Gujarati, and Swahili, and English. Moez was born and raised in Uganda where he stayed until 1972. At the age of twenty-two he was evacuated from Uganda as a refugee to a camp in Italy. His parents had migrated to Canada earlier but Moez had wanted to stay and complete his studies. In 1973 he migrated to Montreal where he lives and works. Moez speaks five languages, Gujarati, Katchi, Swahili, English, and French.

Anissa was born in Kenya where she completed her primary and secondary schooling. She then went to England for further study. Anissa graduated in 1970 and returned to Kenya. She and her husband migrated to Canada in 1974 to join her sisters who emigrated in 1972 from Uganda. After completing a degree, Anissa, her daughter and husband moved to Pakistan her husband's birthplace. Anissa has lived in Canada and

Pakistan at various points of her life. She speaks seven languages Katchi, Gujurati, Punjabi, Urdu, Swahili, English, and French.

Eleven of the respondents had relatives in Canada who offered to sponsor them. Twelve of the fifteen respondents were in their teens or early twenties at the time of their migration to Canada. These eleven were following the advice of their parents, who were also leaving Africa for Canada. I believe it is significant in terms of their sense of belonging that most of the respondents were in their teens and early twenties at the time of their arrival in Canada. They have been living in Canada for the past twenty-five years on average, and consider Canada to be home. Six of the respondents were sent to western countries to study at the secondary and university levels. The considerable migration that most of these respondents have experienced is noteworthy inasmuch as they have learned to adapt to new places and ideas. Their facility for languages is evident, with each respondent being capable of communicating in at least four languages and sometimes as many as eight. It is interesting to note that migration took place within Africa, mostly for economic reasons, as well as within Canada, and sometimes the United States for the same reason. These patterns are intriguing, it is not surprising, given their history, that some of the respondents expressed that though they are happy where they are living currently, that should the need arise they would be prepared to move on to new opportunities.

CHAPTER V

BOUNDARIES OF IDENTITY

General Considerations

In the following two chapters each topic will be introduced, quotes from the respondent(s) will follow, and then a discussion of the findings will be provided. The goal of this format is to present the views of the respondents as much as possible in their own words. I want to reiterate that the findings provided are not to be generalised to a larger population but are valuable in their own right in terms of what they bring to our understanding of identity and belonging for members of the Central and East African-Asian diaspora. The ability of the respondents to articulate their points in such an eloquent fashion attests to the excellent education that they have received. Their agreement to participate in my research was part and parcel of their respect for and emphasis on education. The ways in which people discuss where they have lived, and are living is influenced by where they are, and more importantly who they are talking to. And while I do have concerns regarding the appropriateness of a white Anglo Saxon studying the lives and meanings of East and Central African-Asians, much of what my respondents have said to me has allayed my initial concerns. Faride a respondent born in Tanzania, currently living in Toronto stated poignantly: "I would much rather talk with you, you do not have the same biases of someone with a similar background." So the potential for Eurocentrism is perceived as less of a threat than the potential bias of someone from

'within'. Faride observed: "I think you are going about this in the right way, you are listening, listening to our stories—that is how we can get towards understanding each other better". It is with great humility that I have attempted to take their words and impart new meaning to them, I have to the best of my ability tried to remain true to the essence of their views. If I have failed it is solely my responsibility and in no way a reflection of their responses.

The issue of multiple identity will begin the discussion, not least because this was the overwhelming characteristic of all of the respondents. The formation, maintenance and implications of multiple identity are considered; the situational nature of identity construction is explored in addition to the influence that location has on identity representation. The varied meanings attributed to being Indian are considered; the deterritorialized nature of Indian as a social category of identification is also discussed. The impact of experiences the respondents have had in Africa is contemplated with an emphasis on memory, place, and the sense of self. Contested identity is delineated in a fashion that facilitates the examination of the role that boundaries, geo-physical and social, play in the formation and maintenance of identity.

Multiple Identity

East and Central African-Asians that I interviewed expressed their identity in terms of numerous characteristics, place of birth, origins, religious affiliation, colonial referents, current country of residence, and cultural practices. Many lived in more than one African country at times holding multiple citizenship. It is unlikely, given the range of options

with which to define their identity that the respondents will choose to express who they are in a singular fashion.

The ability of the respondents to articulate with clarity the complexity of their own identity is linked in part to the nature of their religious training and upbringing. The parents of the respondents were very particular about passing on values and traditions of their religion and Indian origins. The respondents have a subtle appreciation for the nuances of their identity, how it is manifested and under which conditions, and the effect of location on the negotiation, maintenance, and presentation of self. Without exception respondents wanted me to have a clear picture of who they are and what is important to them. While it may seem like I am beginning with what should be the end, I have chosen to address the issue of multiple identity first as it encompasses all the aspects of what follows. People as a rule like to fix others in place, situate them within their own paradigms; the concept of multiple identity is more challenging, elusive. Members of the African-Asian diaspora have crossed multiple borders, cultural as well as cartographic. They have been exposed to and sometimes influenced by many differing ideas, cultures, and political ideologies, social and religious customs and rituals. To expect members of a diaspora to have a finite sense of self or a singular description of their identity is simplistic and does not respect their varied experiences. They may, at times choose to present a singular aspect of their identity if doing so will be to their advantage. In the context of an interview that welcomed complex responses the issue of identity came forth as a myriad of infinite possibilities, just as varied and engaging as the respondents

themselves. When asked how he identifies himself, Iqbal a respondent born in Tanzania, who studied in England and now lives in Montreal responded:

Interesting, at the very core of my being my identity is defined by my faith and within my faith the specific group that I belong to which is the Shia Ismaili Muslims. That is the core of my being and then if you want to go around the next layer would be my Indian or Asian heritage my cultural background.

Later in the interview, Iqbal went on to suggest that he is East African, his emotive ties to Tanzania outweigh any feelings he has for India. What needs to be underlined here is that Iqbal's identity is a composite of religious, social, cultural, and political definers. The identities are multiple but not impervious to one another. The importance Iqbal ascribes to his religious identity is clear in his account. His religious background is integral to the way he lives his life.

Amina, born in Uganda now living in Montreal who describes herself as a Canadian Ismaili of Indian origins born in Africa notes: "Anything to give the other person a clearer picture of who I am." She wants those she comes into contact with to realise that she has more to offer, perspectives and ideas from many places, cultures and belief systems.

Moez, born in Tanzania and now living in Montreal states:

I always respond I am a Canadian of Indian origins born in Africa, through my faith first and foremost I am an Ismaili, as an Ismaili which we are a minority. Through the teachings of our leader who encourages that you are part and parcel of the community you are living in, I am an Ismaili of Indian origins who was born in Africa and now lives in Canada.

The respondents quoted above were illustrative of the common thread throughout the interviews. They without exception employed more than one descriptor when defining their identity. They go into such detail routinely as they feel it is important for others to know that they are a mixture of more than one possibility, that they have viewpoints and ideas that emerge from more than one place and ideological system.

Where one is and who one is talking to definitely influences how one describes one's identity. Parveen, born in Tanzania, and raised in Kenya makes clear the distinction that location can make in the construction of identity:

In Africa I described myself as Indian, I guess because it was a predominately African culture I couldn't tell an African I'm African so I was Indian; to a British person I would say I'm Indian. From the moment I arrived in Canada I said I was Kenyan; somehow it became important I think I was transported, transplanted. I'm not an indigenous Canadian. I didn't know if I'll ever be or if my kids could ever say that. Somehow I can not say, I don't know for the life of me, I can not say Indian because

I've never been there, I have no absolutely no roots that I could identify with absolutely none. I'm Kenyan.

The situational nature of identity is vividly represented in Parveen's discourse. It was preferable for African-Asians to differentiate themselves from other Africans despite being born in an African country. The social status of the Indian population was superior to the majority of Africans. In this context, it was desirable to align oneself with the wealthier classes, hence the demarcation and emphasis on being Indian. Imran, born in Uganda and currently living in Montreal explains:

The British brought in a class structure among the people. The British always built in the high land, the best property and the best area of the country, they treated us as second in the hierarchy. The Asians lived in a really homogeneous group, and the blacks were supposedly on the lowland, an area where very few of the Indian community would settle. The class structure was reinforced for us too, I think for the Asian community in particular we saw the British and the blacks, and we were somehow in the middle. For the Indian community as such, it was very accommodating, to be left alone, and yet to have very many privileges, which the black people did not have. We had privileges in the sense that the Asian community, or the Indian community, because of the affluence that the Indian community enjoyed, because they were in the business sector, or they were civil servants, working for the government, or for

banks. I think in my case, my parents were in business where they had enough money to enjoy a certain level of lifestyle, so you could have an exclusive house, or a car, or belong to a club.

Imran's description of hierarchy under British rule is a vivid picture of a congruent geophysical and social hierarchy. Asians were in the middle of the hierarchy and tended to aspire to be associated with the British as part of the privileged class. Schooling was under the British system with many instructors from England. The tendency to lean towards 'all things British' has had a profound effect on Imran in terms of his identity and his feelings for England.

For us England was more of a home country, and this shows the tremendous influence the British system had, because politically educationally, it was all the British system, and we grew up in that environment, [so] that for us taking a real holiday would mean to visit England. I never had the chance, but many of my friends, many families too, and in my family too, there was always a second, an extension of your family in the UK.

The strong influence of the British colonial system on Imran is illustrated in this passage. Suggesting that England is a home country is profound; it should be noted that this applied while living in Uganda. Since immigration to Canada, Imran invokes Uganda as a home country. He describes himself primarily as Ugandan and part of being Ugandan

encompasses the British influences that he was exposed to and a part of while living there. It is noteworthy that an East African-Asian is identifying more with the British than with his Indian roots that he remarks are “simply tied to my skin colour”. Skin colour for Imran is the second criteria for his identity construction. In the final analysis, it is birthplace that holds the greatest importance for Imran in terms of his identity.

While it was beneficial to ally oneself with the privileged classes in Africa, in Canada Parveen identifies herself as Kenyan, the country where she was raised. Parveen could not elaborate on why there had been a shift “it just became important”. Many other respondents experienced the same phenomenon. They chose to define themselves, or at least a part of themselves as African in Canada, though they did not do so in Africa. Skin colour was named frequently as the main criteria for being Indian. The fact that they were born and raised in Africa is not outwardly manifested. It only becomes known when the respondents choose to tell others. Their African background is the main way in which they differ from other Pakistanis and Indians living in Canada. By stating their place of birth in their self-descriptions the respondents are creating a boundary between themselves and Indians and Pakistanis from their respective countries; and articulating an interstitial identity in the process.

Parveen raises another important point when she explains that “I couldn’t tell an African I was African” In East Africa it was not enough to be born in the country to gain the distinction of being African. One needed to be black. Nor as mentioned previously would it have been socially desirable. It is curious that now in Canada, Parveen is often taken to

task when she tells people she is Kenyan: “you are not black enough” a comment she has heard frequently in Canada. Initially she would become frustrated by the comment but she has concluded that many Canadians are simply not aware that people of Indian origin formed a community in Africa. Or, for that matter, that being Kenyan encompasses more than just being black. For Parveen, being Kenyan meant in part being raised there. The same criteria used in Africa are being applied in Canada. Outward indicators of identity namely skin colour, that cannot be changed set the tone for the impressions others have of who we are, challenging these initial impressions puts other’s perspectives into question and there is often a reaction, sometimes quite pointed as in Parveen’s case. It is perhaps due to the constant challenging of their identity that they are digging in their heels, underlining their differences and articulating who they are with such insistence.

Identity is formed, negotiated and renegotiated in the presence of others. Bakhtin’s concept of the excess of seeing comes into play; we need others for the completion of our identities, even if their only purpose is to serve as a contrast to ourselves. Parveen did not identify with Indians and Pakistanis born in India or Pakistan, she expresses this difference through her emphasis on her place of birth. There is a reflexivity that takes place in these situations, as much as others are attempting to situate Parveen by asking her if she is Indian, Indians and Pakistanis are, in a way, fixing themselves in opposition to her, reinforcing their own sense of self in the process.

The role of the other in identity construction more often than not takes on a political connotation. Those in position of power are more likely to define or situate others

according to their own needs and desires. In the case of the British in Uganda a social hierarchy was established that had a physical connotation in terms of where people could live. Keith and Pile's view that: "the spatiality of the diaspora is the ground on which momentary and ever-shifting lines are drawn between inside and outside, oppressor and oppressed, the same and other"(Keith and Pile, 1993:18) comes into relief at this point. Majorities have always situated the respondents of this study. When they lived in colonial Africa privileged minorities situated them. The manner that this is manifested may be direct, in terms of exclusive white only clubs in Africa, or indirect when they are asked by Canadians how can you be from Africa you are not black? The underlining of difference, social exclusion may not always be intentional but it is the inevitable outcome from the moment they are asked "where are you from?" Perhaps on a positive note the question opens the door for the construction of self to the other as one would like to be understood or more practically in the way that best promotes one's self-interest. When we consider Charles Taylor's views on the politics of recognition, namely that misrecognition, or nonrecognition may inflict harm, the ability of the social agent to negotiate their identity is enmeshed in the views others hold. It is enmeshed in their internalised notions of how others view them. A positive construction of identity is, in part, dependent upon due recognition, which the respondents have not always received. In the case of the respondents even the terms employed for self-definition may be and are contested; this will be considered presently.

What Does it Mean to be Indian?

Respondents were asked to describe themselves and to explain what they meant by their description. 'Being Indian' was a common descriptor. But what it means to be 'Indian' is not necessarily the same for all respondents. To address the potential for difference I asked respondents what being "Indian" means for them. The following are excerpts of the answers:

Faori born in Burundi and currently living in Toronto explains: "My culture and origins are Indian, in the depth of my being it is who I am. I have Indian blood, I speak Indian languages, my clothes, and food are all Indian. My nose is pierced I have a typical Indian look." Faori brings forth many aspects of Indian-ness in her response. The life force of her body—the blood, is Indian. This illustrates how being Indian is fundamental to her sense of self; it permeates every part of her existence. This is an inner manifestation of what it means to be Indian alternately Faori outwardly expresses her Indian-ness in part through her manner of dressing, her pierced nose and by speaking many Indian languages.

Parveen has two teenage children. She is concerned that her children may be losing touch with a part of their identity:

I don't want them to lose thousands of years of history and thousands of years of culture do you know what I mean? I mean nothing is going to change just because you came to another soil doesn't mean that that has to change.

The deterritorialized nature of identity construction is illustrated in this passage. Here Indian relates more to history and cultural traditions that are passed on from one generation to the next. Parveen suggests that Indian-ness is portable—not place dependent. Her concern for her children ‘losing’ their culture indicates that though her culture may be portable it may not be as easy to establish in Canada as it may have been in Africa. Parveen has never lived in India. Indian culture and history that she learned growing up in Tanzania has travelled with her to Canada where she now imparts them to her children.

Many respondents expressed that Indian identity represents values and family. The strong values that were imparted to them during their upbringing have stood them in good stead for their lives. Iqbal suggests India represents:

The idea of family, family being close, helping others, the concept of the extended family, the value placed on friendship, personal values like trust and integrity, I’m not saying all Asians are like this but these are some of the things I was brought up with. That was the definer.

The family has a strategic role in the daily lives of my respondents. All expressed close ties to their families; those with children take the responsibility of child rearing very seriously. Many echo the need to pass on the values mentioned by Iqbal on to their children. The values of integrity, honesty, and trust are paramount and are noted as integral in their sense of who they are, and why in some cases they have managed to adapt

to a North American way of life without losing touch with their 'Indian' side. The values are also linked to their religious beliefs.

Arzina, born in Burundi and now living in Montreal discusses what she means by Indian origins:

The culture, food and upbringing is what I mean by origins. I have friends in the community who are from India and they are different [culture] I am not a true Indian despite my parents and grandparents. I have changed here, ways that you get from living, adopting western ways.

Arzina has never been to India though she would like to visit one day. She sees herself as different from Indians from India yet defines her origins, culture, and upbringing as Indian. True Indians for Arzina are those that are born there; she has changed in Canada, adopting western ways. The way one lives one's life is paramount in self-definition. The complexity of Arzina's identity is a result of her experiences of living her life under numerous influences.

Zeitune born in Tanzania and currently living in Montreal suggests:

I guess whenever I think about Indian culture it is the family unit. More I think about all the things the family unit is the strongest. Some of the traditions that we have the dresses that we wear. It means that I have some

of the culture, cultural aspects of India even though I cannot relate to India because I have never been to India.

Alta born in Uganda and currently living in Montreal articulates what being Indian means for her:

I call myself an Indian because I speak the language, I eat and prepare Indian food, I wear Indian clothes my origins are Indian, my grandparents come from India, my parents have gone back and visited India, I love the Indian culture, I sing Indian songs, I speak the language and yet I think that if I was to go back, if I were to go to India I don't think I'd fit in.

The demarcation between the meaning of Indian as a means of socio-cultural identification and as an affiliation to a particular place is underlined in these passages. Clearly the act of being born or living in India is not requisite to the right of calling oneself Indian. Zeitune and Alta are pointing out that despite being Indian in terms of self-description, this is not a guarantee of being at ease in India. Zeitune and Alta are affiliating themselves with an imagined community of the African-Asian diaspora. They are mapping their lives in a manner that transcends, or perhaps ignores geo-physical boundaries. They are nonetheless aware that there is a difference between Indians from India and who they believe they are; they are quite aware of this as manifested by their suggestion that they would not feel at ease in India. India as a place takes on an importance but not as a source of a 'home' country but rather as an arbitrary title for the

place in which some of their culture and beliefs originated. By exploring the ways African-Asians believe they differ from those born in India we gain insight into how identity is forged when it is contested by Indians and Pakistanis who claim right to their title by virtue of citizenship:

Laila born in Tanzania and now living in Montreal visited India and relates her feelings about the trip:

I just went to India about eight years ago when AKF had organised a trip to India and Pakistan to see the projects. I went there and that was the first time I had been to India and the only thing that I could identify there was the language that I spoke and it was the same language that brought me like closer to India. But otherwise if I wouldn't have been there it wouldn't have made any difference to me, I wouldn't have missed anything. I am East African Indian. In India when I went I could see the difference between the food that we have. It may be the same curry may be curry for example chicken curry but the way it is made in India they use a lot of spices as opposed to East Africans who use more tomatoes so the *taste would be different but the name would be the same* (italics added) so it's more Indian than the cuisine that we eat at home.

This passage provides a glimpse of the complexity of multiple-identities. India as a place held very little emotional value for Laila; language was the only aspect that she identified with. The selection of food as an illustration of difference is significant. Just as the names

of dishes are the same but taste different, African-Asians who claim to be Indian call themselves Indian yet are not the same as those from India.

Faori's experiences in India and her reactions to the reception she received during her visit are illustrative of the challenges that may be faced when criteria for self-definition are not aligned along the same axis:

I did not feel good in India. We were seen as foreigners, different from those who live there, not inhabitants. This was a source of extreme sadness as we consider ourselves Indian, they were our compatriots, but they did not feel the same way...It was painful to see our compatriots in such poor conditions.

When I inquired as to how she reconciles the actual events during her visit with her sense of self, she explains that India is the source of her culture, and describes herself and others she knows from Africa as 'imported Indians' as their travels have changed them. Fundamentally however in her opinion they share the same culture even if some of the actual practices have changed compared with those living in India. Indian is invoked as a social category. For 'imported Indians' one does not have to be from there to be Indian, this is strongly contested by the indigenous population who consider themselves Indian by virtue of the territory in which they are living. As 'imported Indians' 'return' to India, new meanings are constructed around Indian as a descriptor of identity. Shifts in the meaning of 'being Indian' creates tension between India as a site and Indian as a social category. Respondents who visited India remained, for the most part, unfazed by the

tenuous relationship. On the other hand, local inhabitants appeared to be disturbed by the challenge to their understanding of what 'being Indian' represents, as evidenced by their insistence on demarcating difference between themselves and respondents who visited.

Iqbal visited India a number of years ago. I asked Iqbal how he was received in India:

So here's an interesting one, they could tell that I was not from India. More importantly they could tell I was from East Africa, without me telling them. I was by and large fascinated, I think I was fascinated, amused simply because I knew that I was part of them. And so if they could tell fine you know. I was no different from them.

Zul, born in Tanzania is now living in Montreal; his views are similar to Iqbal's:

The moment I landed in India instantly after ten seconds on land that I could identify with the psyche of an Indian because it is my own. I felt comfortable in that land. Where I speak the language fluently not one but ten Indian languages. I felt very much at home, I felt very comfortable there you know understanding the psyche of the Indian what his thought process was, because it's the same as mine. But I was always longing to come back to Montreal. Because most of the places I was accepted like an Indian tourist returning home; basically deep inside there was no argument within myself. I had just come here as a tourist. There they say you are a

foreigner. I said sure right. But you know though I looked like an Indian when I went there, I was dressing like an Indian. But these people they would definitely know that this guy is a tourist.

When I asked Iqbal to elaborate on how he was a part of them he could not. He believes that he is fundamentally the same as those living in India, at least in the basic sense of values and culture. Zul was a bit more precise suggesting that he has the same psyche as the Indians from India. Initially he was comfortable yet he wanted to return to Montreal. The way that Iqbal and Zul talk about the Indians that they met in India seems to indicate that they were not fazed by their reception, that even if those living there did not believe they were Indian that was ok because they know that they are. Their security on this issue appears to be unshakeable, not unlike Faori's point that though those living there thought they were foreigners, she knew they were compatriots. Their ability to forge a sense of belonging, not necessarily to India as a place but rather to being Indian as a way of life, as a socio-cultural category seems squarely rooted in their sense of self. The strength they call upon to maintain their identity is based on a strong sense of who they are, in their collective history as part of a diaspora, finally as part of an imagined community, that they see has linkages with all Indians regardless of where they are. Parminder Bachu's argument that transnationals have numerous connections, local, national, and international may be taken one step further in this paradigm. The connections that transcend Bachu's local, national and international linkages are those that involve bonds that the respondents felt for India as representative of the site of their cultural origins. The bonds are imagined, and encompass all those who share an 'Indian' upbringing.

Africa and the Heart

Africa as the place of birth and country where most of the respondents lived out their childhood years has a special meaning. The meaning extends to Africa as a place, as the site of their memories. The feelings respondents expressed for Africa are heartfelt and illustrate how memories that are tied to a specific location lend an importance to the place. The mapping of life histories necessitates the recognition that a place may influence social agents on many levels. At times we are tied to the physical as sentient beings. Their feelings for Africa are articulated in terms of heart-felt love of the time they were there along with sadness at the recognition that they may never go back, and even if they did it has changed, many times for the worse. The reaction of respondents to this realisation is mixed though many prefer not to return and to leave their memories intact.

Alta expresses her feelings for Uganda very eloquently:

I tasted the land with my spirit, I tasted Uganda because I grew up there as a child and I roamed around, I had my feet in the ground, on the grass and up the trees and in the water and that experience I'll never forget. I tell my children that I used to remove my shoes and socks and walk this huge patch of green grass in the morning with the dew on the grass and come out the other side with wet feet and I'll never forget that but this was very much a part of my bringing up of my childhood memories and the friends that I was with you know would charge out of school at lunchtime and just

run all the way home or stop somewhere in between like for ice cubes with um sugar and food colouring because it was so hot and this would be our way of cooling off and I don't know how many pennies we paid for it you know cents but and they'd give it to us on a square of newspaper, printed newspaper, we didn't care if the ink was running and these are the things that that I grew up with that are very much a part of me. Climbing up trees and breaking off mangoes. We'd take chilli pepper and salt and sugar and put it in a little piece of newspaper and put it in our pocket, and then either on our way to school or on from our way back from school we'd throw stones and break the mangoes from the trees, and then we'd dip it into this mixture and then just eat it raw. We broke guava off the trees and ate it. When I went back to Africa to live for a short while the minute I arrived I felt a part of the place, the smell, the beauty, my memories came flooding back.

As Alta related this story she looked past me and out the window of the coffee shop and we were silent for a moment. It was like she had transported herself mentally back to the places of her childhood. These memories are vivid and are very much a part of who she has become, a part of her that can not be taken away. Lefebvre's suggestion that we unite the "physical", the "mental", and the "social" is well taken in Alta's case. Arguably it is not possible to consider her narrative in any other fashion if we wish to analyse her story in its entirety. The physical characteristics of Africa the grass, mangoes, heat to name a few touched Alta, and now have been reconstituted mnemonically. These experiences

have shaped who she has become and how she relates socially with others. When we consider the complexity of the lives of diaspora populations these fields are meshed with memories and actual time and space acting on and off of one another with fields of experience that transcend boundaries that are physical, and social. Like oral history, diaspora memory may be adjusted to meet requirements at new locales. The physical reaction that the respondents expressed on returning to Africa is tied not only to the physical characteristics but also to the memories or the cognitive impact that the physical triggers produced in the respondents. These can not be considered separately. In order to comprehend attachment we need to examine the three fields together. While Alta felt many emotions run through her on arrival in East Africa, she had initial problems adapting socially. Her perspectives had changed, she believes that she is far more liberal now, less rigid specifically in terms of the demarcation between herself and the blacks. The changes resulted in sanctions from her relatives who had returned to Africa many years earlier. Her life in Canada has changed her way of seeing the world and this had an impact socially as her views were at odds with other East African-Asians. Alta is unable to ever truly return to Kenya, the way she lives her life now is fundamentally different from the ways she knew when she first lived there.

Iqbal's rendition of his visit to East Africa is contrasted to his visit to India:

No I mean I was kind of happy to be there [in India] to be able to tell my children or grandchildren or whatever that I had been. It did not do much for me emotionally if anything it just but for the grace of God there go I.

Because when you look at some of the abject poverty it gets to you. Interesting enough the following year I went to Kenya although it's part of East Africa I was born in Tanzania the minute I got off the plane I had a lump in my throat. The smells, I don't know, whatever it was it really moved me.

The visceral response Iqbal had on arriving in East Africa underlines the strong linkages that may be formed between social agents and their surroundings. The memories that flooded back to Iqbal upon his arrival took him by surprise. We are intimately connected to our surroundings. These ties are not completely severed when we leave a place rather they lie dormant until our return. At other times it is not necessary to actually return to the original site; we can be persuaded in the same way by familiar smells and sounds, they may carry us back in our minds to the places we associate them with. There is a gamut of emotions that are brought forth in such instances, especially when the place is imbued with symbolic meaning.

Arzina relates how she feels about her birthplace:

Because I was born there, I have a very soft spot for Africa. I know things have changed, I have not been back to my birthplace. It is too dangerous, it is not the Africa I used to know. Weekends and evenings our family would get together and my uncles would sing. We would have music parties, we didn't always have a tabla so we would use pots and pans. Good

memories, we would go for picnics, big ones with three, four families together, it would happen often. I miss this here in Canada. Family gatherings were frequent; family had a different meaning a bigger meaning. Weekends were free time much more than here. Here everyone is very busy, everyone has his or her own things, it is very individualistic. Yes I miss it but I like the independence here, I enjoy Canada.

Arzina smiled while relating this story especially the part about using pots and pans for drums. The time in Africa is remembered as laid back and relaxed despite the occasional political unrest. At times she and her family were forced to flee to a neighbouring country until political conditions improved. Nonetheless Africa is remembered with a mixture of fondness and sadness. Coming to Canada has its advantages particularly increased independence and safety. The price is a loss of closeness with family. Socialising occurs but not as often and the pace of life in Canada is much more demanding than when she lived in Africa; this is one of the trade-offs that Arzina has made by immigrating to Canada.

Zul born in Tanzania, grew up in Uganda and is now living in Montreal explains why he does not want to return to Uganda:

I would not go back to Uganda because I have such great memories of Uganda. I left Uganda when it was in its hey days; it was absolutely fantastic. Everything looked very big to me because I was so small.

Everything was so big it was a big country come to think of it, the biggest department store in Kampala the biggest department store it was known as Draper's and, when I look at that the dollar store in my neighbourhood is bigger than the biggest department store but to me that was a real big department store. I have very good memories of Uganda and I would like to keep them rather than go and see the whole thing destroyed because Uganda is in shambles, basically the whole country has been set back a couple of hundred years. And I'd rather stay with the good memories, than to go back and destroy my great memories.

Zul wishes to protect his memories by not returning to Uganda. His memories are part of who he is, treasures that he does not want to tamper with. The decree forcing Zul and his family out of Uganda was most painful, as was the lack of response from the rest of the world. He became quite sad while discussing Uganda, what it once was and what it has now become. It is clear that Uganda as Zul's place of birth holds a special place in his heart. Zul was not the only respondent with these views, yet in some cases respondents expressed a desire to return to their place of birth. The reasons for returning are varied. Some expressed the wish to introduce their children to where they grew up, others just to see their homes one more time, and some simply as tourists.

Those from Uganda also had issues regarding the manner in which they were forced out of the country by Idi Amin Dada.

Imran born and raised in Uganda explains:

Even now when I talk with my own children, I always say that we left the country, we thought that it was only temporary, that there would be a public outcry, or world pressure on Idi Amin, to reverse his decision, and then we could go back again. Because I cannot relate to India or Pakistan, with my children now, if I had the opportunity to take them anywhere in the world it would be to Uganda. I may be thinking more, maybe I am nostalgic about my home country in that sense, perhaps it is more because if I had left the country voluntarily, I don't think I would still have sentiments about the country. Because we were forced to leave, I feel that something, that there has to be a closure for me to go back again, and see it once, say to my children this is where I was born and grew up. In that sense there is a lot of memories there.

Protecting his memories is not a main priority for Imran; I had the sense that Imran is still very tied to his birthplace, there was a rupture when he was forced to leave. By returning he hopes to attain closure. He is aware that things have changed since he left. Uganda as a place is pulling Imran back. He considers himself to be Ugandan and resents the manner in which he was forced to leave his home.

The time leading up to expulsion was also very traumatic for Ugandans of Indian origins. Moez, born and raised in Uganda claims that after independence "you could feel the

power and the force that you were no longer considered Ugandan". It should be noted that all of the Ugandan respondents took Ugandan citizenship at the point of independence. The pressures from Ugandans intensified as time went by as evidenced by human rights violations. The personal impact of these experiences is tragic. In some cases the fear induced by simply hearing of the misfortune of others was enough to encourage members of the Indian community to leave. Moez provides a powerful example of the pressures on 'non-Ugandans' to leave: "As the years went by we felt more and more insecure. We were told to line up in Kampala and the army took our documents and tore them up in front of us. It was very unnerving."

Moez was very emotional while relating this story. He, like Imran, is angry with the international community for not stepping in at the time to put an end to the discrimination. Choosing to become Ugandan at the point of independence was a show of solidarity with fellow Ugandans, with the country's leaders. The decision to take on Ugandan citizenship was recommended by the religious leaders of the community. The choice was not easy given that their identities were not tied to any single place. The choice was made for practical as well as emotional reasons. Practically speaking they believed it would ease tensions between the Asian community and African leaders, emotionally they felt a part of Uganda having been born and brought up there. Having their papers destroyed—in some cases these were the first citizenship papers they had ever held—was very traumatising. It was a successful intimidating tactic as many Asians chose to flee even before the decree was announced. Moez's family left and despite pleas by his family, Moez elected to stay on to complete his studies. In the end he was evacuated to a

refugee camp. Moez would like to return to Uganda for a visit but only as a tourist. Moez wishes he could go back and live there but he is too nervous about his safety. The wounds of expulsion have not fully healed; he prefers the security and peace of mind he has in Canada.

These passages offer a rich diversity of viewpoints regarding Africa as a place. The views of the respondents were varied and complex in terms of their feelings for Africa. Patricia Yaeger's point that "place only persuades us because it is made up of reiterated stories and objects that produce a constant and pervasive sense of locatability" (1996:20) is reinforced by the respondents' accounts. The levels of recognition for those who returned to Africa were multi-sensory; likewise, respondents are reconstructing Africa in multi-sensory ways. The meanings that the respondents impart to these memories are individual and specific yet the overwhelming constant is that Africa is an integral part of them. Africa symbolises their beginnings, and whether the return is physical or cognitive, respondents find they are a part of the land. In the final analysis, the history of the respondents is tied to place, there have been radical changes in their countries of birth but their memories remain. The fear of destroying one's recollections by returning underlines the value of the imaginary on our sense of emotional security. Rather than threaten these memories with 'reality' they prefer not to return. What they may be missing by protecting their memories is the positive visceral response described by Iqbal as well as others who have returned. The feelings that the respondents expressed for India pale in comparison to those expressed for Africa. While India represents the country of their origins, often the birthplace of grandparents, the importance it has for the respondents is primarily symbolic

in terms of stories and customs that they learned while growing up. Those who visited identified with Indians living there yet noted a difference, a thin line of separation, that line being Africa. India as a place could not persuade the respondents, physically they were unmoved. Transmigrants are perhaps best positioned to clarify the issues regarding the significance of place. The imaginary plays an essential role in forging and maintaining their identity. In a way they are better placed to feel secure, physical sites change, new meanings imparted but the imaginary is relatively impervious.

Contested Identity

Members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora are not always able to define their identity in terms that fit neatly with social and cultural stereotypes. Alta, born in Uganda now living in Montreal had a very difficult time regarding how she defined herself and oddly this was not in India or Pakistan but rather in the United States where she went to college. Her account challenges perspectives on identity construction. Alta's case brings forth the suffering that may occur when dealing with such issues, contested identity is difficult at the best of times but when one is not clear personally in terms of who they are and how they want or should represent themselves it can be most alienating.

We had one Indian boy from India Karim and he was there and he was all excited because he knew that I was coming and that I was Indian he said "ooh well great where are you from?" I said well I'm Indian but I'm not from India and he said, "oh have you ever been there?" And I said no and he just couldn't quite grasp the fact that I was Indian but I had never lived

there because for him it was just as new or just as different that he was from India and had come to the States to study. He didn't know that there were that many Indians who were outside of India who had made their homes elsewhere but that had never been to India but were still Indian and called themselves that culturally I would call myself an Indian. And here I was in wearing a pair of jeans and a T-shirt and I just felt like I wasn't belonging but then I wasn't sure what I was supposed to belong to. I called myself an Indian but I found that I was very different than Karim. Because he came from India he had been brought up there. India was his home so he had a country; I didn't have one even though I had a Ugandan citizenship. I felt that while he felt himself to be a real Indian and I was just an outsider or a fake Indian, but not a true Indian.

Alta's story brings to light the complexity of diaspora identity and the struggles embedded within. For Karim one needed to be from India to be Indian. Alta and Karim were constructing what it means to be Indian in different ways. Faced with a 'true' Indian, Alta felt like a fake, an impostor. A lack of homeland made Alta feel inferior and more insecure. The dynamics of this situation are intriguing; an Indian from India was contesting an African-Asian's identity in the United States. The college chose a roommate for Alta who had lived in India with the assumption that Alta would feel more at ease; this too was a source of angst:

My roommate the first year was a missionary kid from India and I that's one of the reasons I think that they had set me up with her because she had lived in India. She was white. I found that they were able to relate, there was a whole group of them who came from Madipradesh, I think they had their missionary set up there. They were able to relate more to Karim. They seemed to have more in common with him than I did. Because they were very fluent in Hindi they all wore lengas the guys who were there wore pyjamas with their vests, the girls very often wore the long lengas skirts and tops to go with them. But saris and shalwar kameez and lengas were totally foreign to me, you can't imagine, and when I went to the States they'd say put on your traditional outfit and I said I don't have one. I had I didn't bring a sari with me because I had never worn one and so I told my Mom to send one to me from Kinshasa. We had an international student's association where I went to school and everybody had their traditional native outfits and other students at the college wanted me to share my culture with them. They would especially have a day or a weekend where other students would come and mingle with us and talk to us about our culture. I had never been so embarrassed because I was supposed to be Indian and I didn't know a bloody thing about being Indian as such as a traditional Indian from India.

The situation Alta found herself in is quite extraordinary. White students, born in the United States, who had lived in India, were more 'Indian' than she was. Alta found

herself at a point where she needed to request that traditional clothing be sent to her from Africa despite never having worn it before. Alta was trying to forge a sense of belonging by conforming to the standards set by Karim and the white students who had lived in India. The standards were also imposed by fellow students from other backgrounds at international student days. The representation of Indian was stereotypical, manifested primarily through dress. These international student days were designed to celebrate the uniqueness of the student population and to learn about one another's culture. In the final analysis such events led to painful reckoning for Alta. These events underlined difference rather than promoting inclusion. For students that had their identity tied to their place of birth, where country and culture gelled as one, international student days were less of an issue, they could in a sense set their own standards, experts on what it means to be from a specific place. But Alta did not enjoy the same security. She did not have a home to return to, her cultural repertoire was diverse, not easily defined. Alta was already facing the stress of being away from her family and being immersed in a new culture. The events at her school brought forth issues regarding belonging and identity that she has not resolved even to this day. The representation of what it means to be Indian included one's manner of dress—even in the United States. How odd for Alta, of Indian origins, brown, to feel different, set apart not on the basis of being a minority in the United States but rather for not being Indian enough. Her habit of dressing in western clothing stemmed from living in Uganda where her family and indeed all respondents from this study tended to want to align themselves with the colonisers. They were nonetheless subjects of the empire, subjugated to the colonising power. Alta's experiences at her school were imbued with an undercurrent of control. Classmates tried to fix her into place, categorise her

according to distinctions that they were comfortable with, when she did not meet these expectations social pressures were exerted, admittedly these may not have been intentional but rather a response to Alta as an enigma. Those who do not fit neatly into categories challenge existing codes of identification that can upset balance and security for the individual and those around them. Social pressures may be as simple as requests for elaboration on identity indicators. Foucault's discussion of power as it relates to the subject is brought into relief in Alta's case. Foucault suggests that a form of power is exercised whereby individuals are made subjects. He imparts two meanings to the word subject namely: "...subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or a self-knowledge." (1982:212). The repeated inquiries as to her origins, the repeated reaction to her claim of being Indian, and international student days are examples of the exercise of power over Alta. Neither her fellow students nor the faculty were doing this deliberately; their reaction to Alta may be understood as a response to an individual who did not fit squarely into their paradigm of what it means to be Indian. Nonetheless, the outcome for Alta was concrete and resulted in changes in her behaviour. Confusion regarding her identity was brought to the surface by their attempts to categorise her, creating stress and sadness. Alta went on to try to conform to her peers' conception of what it means to be Indian by altering her manner of dressing and by speaking Indian languages, something that she rarely did growing up in East Africa. They had effectively defined what being Indian represented, specifically in terms of language and dress. She became tied to their interpretation of her identity in a way that made her not only a subject to their control, but subject to the changes in her self-knowledge.

The problems that Alta faced are a result of competing views of what it means to be Indian. What Alta was struggling with needn't have been a struggle at all. What we are dealing with in terms of East and Central African-Asians are degrees of Indian-ness, degrees of western influence, degrees of African. Alta had a problem defining her identity. This is not a weakness, in Alta's case she felt inadequate at not being able to perform in a manner consistent with a 'true Indian'. Alta is in fact so much more than this. She has a cultural repertoire to call upon that spans three continents. Nonetheless there is social pressure to 'belong' somewhere; to be linked to a specific place; for members of the diaspora this becomes quite problematic. Alta explanation to her peers on this count is telling:

They'd say "ok where are you from?" Well I was born in Uganda, I moved to Zaire, I'm Indian but I've never been to India, I speak an Indian dialect, I speak Gujarati and Katchi and so on but I do not write either one. I sing Indian songs but I don't know how to write them. I speak my own dialect but I can't read or write it. I prepare Indian food, I eat Indian food but I'm not sure from what province or from what area of India that food traditionally comes from, it's just Indian for me.

Alta's passage illustrates the deterritorialized nature of the markers she uses for identity construction. The 'where' aspect of the markers i.e. food is less important for Alta than the substance "Indian for me". Indian for Alta is different from her peers' notions of what it means to be Indian. Their sense of being Indian is, in the cases of Karim and her

roommate strongly linked to India as a place and their personal experiences there. There are degrees of Indian and different meanings that may be attached to the notion of Indian. Each individual chooses the manner in which they wish to represent their identity it must be noted however that these decisions are influenced by social pressures. In the case of Indian identity and Alta, her peers linked it solidly with India as a country; one needed to be from there or at least lived there to fall squarely into their category. This is evident in the way that the white missionary women who had lived in India, related well with Karim and the other Indians from India at the college. Experiencing India as a place, living there, albeit briefly, was integral to being accepted. Accepted as one who understands Indian culture by virtue of being exposed to it in India. Alta, on the other hand, could only relate to Indian culture as she experienced it in Africa through the teachings and practices of her parents and the Asian community. Students from India or those who had lived in India were accepted, according to Alta's account, as compatriots. We may ask what are the differences? What aspects make East and Central African-Asians different from 'true Indians'? These differences are recognised by respondents and are explained in the following passages.

Amina born in Uganda currently living in Montreal explains how she believes she differs from Indians from India or Pakistan:

I am a Canadian originally from India. My parents are from India, but I am from Africa. I am uncomfortable to say I am from India. I want to put my parents there but I can't put myself there, because I have picked up a lot of

bits about me in Africa. I am not purely African, I am not black. There is a thin line between being Indian and what I am and that line is Africa—I think in Africa we were more liberal, the girls were very open. For example there were no arranged marriages. My traditional dishes are more African than Indian, use the same spices as Indian dishes but somehow it has evolved with African components for example I use coconut-this is my African part this dish is from Africa. I wear saris often, for weddings at the mosque.

The thin line Amina speaks of is not necessarily represented by Africa as a place or directly in terms of African culture. There is certainly a fusion of Indian and African foods; yet none of the respondents mentioned any other African cultural difference, in terms of clothing for example. Africa is important from another perspective. Amina's parents and grandparents migrated from India to Africa to pursue economic possibilities. The act of moving from a strictly Indian environment to one with western and African influences necessitated adapting to a new milieu. In order to adapt and be successful certain Indian traditions were no longer beneficial or desirable. Perhaps it was simply the introduction of new ideas and ways of living that had the greatest impact. There were many Europeans and Americans in Africa when my respondents were living there. The Indian community tended to socialise more with expatriates than with black Africans as they preferred to identify with the wealthier classes. My respondents' parents were all in business and doing quite well financially. This allowed them to send their children (now my respondents) to western style schools either in Africa or in many cases in Europe. The

exposure to European values and beliefs seems to have had a greater impact on my respondents than Africa in and of itself. Certainly food habits changed but this was more in response to available ingredients than any conscious decision to immerse oneself in African culture. Zul born in Tanzania and currently living in Montreal explains the role of culture in identity and the impact of living in Africa:

You see we might have left India a hundred and fifty years or so but we never left our culture. We dressed western, but our thinking was eastern. I grew up in a very strong household culturally very strong. We were given extreme pride in ourselves in our own culture and on our poets, on our traditions, on our philosophies at least in my own household. Growing up in that household we were all taught to be very proud of ourselves as Indians. So our cooking at home was Indian, our way of thinking was Indian our philosophy was Indian. Our traditions were Indian but we dressed very western. I don't think I have taken, absorbed any of the African culture really. Lots of my friends when I challenge them say "oh I am not Indian" because maybe the colonists did a wonderful job on them. I call them slightly weaker souls. The British did a terrific job on them to convince them that you are not Indians, you are not Africans but you are brown Englishmen. And this is what today my friends my Indian friends, they look like me, they talk like me but they think white.

This passage encompasses some of the complexities of diaspora identity. Zul clearly believes that the impact of colonialism on Asian identity transformation was significant compared with the African influence. The hierarchy of the British colonial system along with the desire to affiliate oneself with the socially advantaged encouraged the Asians to study and dress according to western standards. African cultural traditions seem unimportant. Zul's description of brown Englishmen is also telling of his perception of the colonial influence on his peers; he is clearly not pleased with this reality.

All of the respondents dressed in western style clothing while in Africa; and with the exception of three from Tanzania all wear their traditional Indian clothing here in Montreal. This deserves greater attention. The decision to wear western style clothing in Africa was taken by the spiritual leaders of the Ismaili faith in order to align themselves with the successful strata in Africa. This accounts in part for the liberal leanings of the Asian community in Africa. In the final analysis, this advice proved to be quite helpful when Asians needed to migrate to North America. The fact that all of the respondents underwent numerous migrations over their lives has played a role in their capacity to do well wherever they have found themselves; not least because they manage to enhance their knowledge base with each new locale. And, more to the point, their understanding of human nature is acute not least because facing new places, new environments and customs has put into relief the questions of identity and of self. Having struggled with the issues on numerous occasions and for most part come to terms on such issues they are in a far better position to understand and recognise insecurities in others and play them to their own advantage or assist others as the case may be. By playing to their own

advantage I do not mean to imply that they take advantage of others rather they have a keen understanding of the insecurity of others and their need to feel accepted as they have faced these emotions in so many instances under varying conditions. As a result when I ask if they feel accepted here in Canada, they without exception reply yes. They go on to explain that this has less to do with Canadians and how they feel about them and more to do with how they make fellow Canadians feel accepted and worthwhile and in turn the response to their presence is positive.

The adaptation potential amongst the respondents is noteworthy. Added to this is a trust in their own ability to adjust to new environments should the need arise. Strategies and indeed directives for action are made known to the Ismaili community through religious leaders. There is no doubt however that their history of migration, first hand experience of adapting to new places from a very young age have honed these strategies and yielded self-confidence. Zeitune presents examples of strategies and experiences that have helped her to adapt in Canada:

My mom never wore a sari in Africa except to get married. She never wore it because we were brought up because of the religious influences that we had, we were told to become more western then you are able to blend in, know the language. And when you think back it has helped us to move into the Canadian environment. I had those seven years living in England. When I first went to England, I was young, not very mature but then from England to Canada not much difference. Except for the long winters. I lived my life in England in the sense that day-to-day activities are so

different in England compared to East Africa. That aspect was very different. And I lived with my Aunt and Uncle so I was not completely isolated from my family but you were not used to having your Aunt and Uncle leave in the morning and come back in the evening. Very different from East Africa where you would see your family in the afternoon and so that aspect was different. Education-wise we worked just as hard. That was not different. I think mostly the timing and the structures uh were different, a busier lifestyle in England compared to East Africa. I didn't find much of a difference when I came to Canada.

Here the direct effect of migrating to England at an early age facilitated Zeitune's transition to Canada. It should also be noted that East Africa was also quite westernised as mentioned earlier, experiences in Africa were also helpful in this regard.

Laila, born in Tanzania and currently living in Montreal discusses how she began wearing saris in order to attend a function in Pakistan despite never having worn them before:

I started wearing it here only after I first wore a Pakistani Indian dress when I was going on that trip because I had to. I was, we were told that in Pakistan and India you cannot wear your normal dresses because they are very strict. That was about nine years ago. And then I liked it because it was so comfortable so I brought back some more from there. I wear saris only for Ismaili events but I wouldn't wear it if the event was organised by

a non-Ismaili. I don't feel comfortable. I haven't worn it because I don't want to be singled out as an outsider, like a stranger, I want to be part of that group so I would like to be one of them, that's the reason. I don't want to be singled out as a minority.

Other respondents echoed these views. The outward representation of identity is controlled. I think we must recognise that all people at one point or another modify their outward appearance to get their goals met. Laila manipulates her outward appearance according to where she is going, and who might be there. It is clear from this passage that she has no interest in appearing Indian to Canadians who are not Ismaili or of Indian descent. This is in line with the way in which she dressed while growing up in Tanzania. Likewise, she prefers to wear her saris to Ismaili community events in order to be identified as one who belongs.

Anissa, born in Kenya and currently living in British Columbia and Pakistan, holds British, Pakistani, and Canadian citizenship. In Canada and Pakistan she describes herself as "an Asian from East Africa, I cannot take myself away from East Africa and say that I am a Pakistani I cannot do that" Anissa's experiences in Africa are important to her sense of self. She underlines this as a main difference between herself and Pakistanis; she still feels she belongs when she is in Pakistan, the way she has negotiated this is noteworthy:

Urdu is the national language of Pakistan. I speak it when I need to speak it. In Pakistan almost everyone more or less speaks English as well as

different cultures and dialects and communities have their own little dialect going but Urdu is the national language and English is the second language but everyone almost speaks English there all the time. So I mean it took me a while to adjust myself to that cultural background which, my cultural background is different, you see Pakistan is a Muslim state it has its own conservative community yet some communities are very liberal too in the way that they are thinking. The thinking is again narrow-minded, one track but over the years it has changed and I have seen a lot of changes in Pakistan over twenty years. People accept me for what I am, differences are there, my way of talking is there, my dressing up is a little different. I wear the ethnic clothes over there. Yet I wear my jeans all the time. You know, I go on the streets wearing my jeans and my shirt and I just go in the bazaar like most of the youngsters these days do that. It is not like women of my age living in Pakistan. One wouldn't do that, they would wear the cultural clothes, you know, the traditional clothes to go in the bazaar and all that. But for me, I do not have to look at people-and it does not bother me if people look at me, people don't care really as such. I just go out and I do my shopping. Whatever we need to do, I just do, and come home and if people are looking at you and passing comment it just doesn't make a difference. Believe me they don't do that anymore. So I just live there, I have accepted the culture, it doesn't bother me, I fit in very well. I am Asian so I fit in very well. Everyone in Pakistan is brown, we have a lot of ethnic communities as well so Pakistanis have accepted me for what I am.

This passage is brimming with negotiation strategies in order to forge a sense of belonging. Anissa brings forth similarities between herself and Pakistanis from Pakistan namely she speaks the language and she is brown; this allows her to go about her daily routine, live her life as it were in Pakistan as she sees fit. She is Asian she believes she is accepted despite her differences; namely the way she speaks and the manner in which she dresses. Part of this acceptance she links to the fact that since there are many ethnic communities in Pakistan, she is simply part of the African-Asian community. It is clear though that Anissa does not want to simply blend in with Pakistanis. Unlike Laila, she in fact underlines difference by the way in which she dresses. Interestingly, she tends to wear her saris more often in Canada than Pakistan. These habits are symbolic, tending to underline difference rather than similarity, a kind of cultural right of those who reside in more than one place. Perhaps as a defence or response to the inevitable underlining of difference articulated by those who would define her identity as other than their own, embracing the difference making it her own to be treasured and displayed. Parveen born in Tanzania and currently living in Montreal also chooses to emphasise that she has more to offer, namely links to other cultures:

I wear salwaar kameez and saris to mosque and non-Ismaili events. This means to me that I want people to identify that this is Parveen she is Canadian, living in Canada etceteras, she has acquired and follows all the Canadian norms etceteras, but I am actually Indian from birth.

By articulating difference, either verbally, or symbolically through dress, Anissa and Parveen are marking out difference between themselves and 'locals'. They are embracing an interstitial existence in the process. They are negotiating their identity in a manner that expresses the multiple contexts with which they are associated. In so doing, Anissa and Parveen lessen the possibility of being judged by the social standards reserved for those 'from there'. They make clear that they have more to offer, perspectives from another place that they are still a part of; embracing the flexibility of an interstitial existence in the process. Identity in this context becomes plural, and context specific. It is the experiences of displacement, re-territorialization, leaving, returning, settling and moving on that introduces alternate, or similar cultural practices to members of the diaspora, and neither is the same after the introduction. In Anissa's case, she calls upon more than one imagined community, her Indian linkages while in Canada, and a combination of western and African influences in Pakistan.

This chapter has attempted to outline key influences on the formation and maintenance of identity for the respondents. The complex nature of the respondents' identity was presented. Identity for the respondents is layered and defined by numerous descriptors. The role that India, as a socio-cultural descriptor, plays in the respondents' self-definition is outlined, as well as differing perspectives on what being Indian represents. The influences that experiences in Africa have had on the respondents were considered. Finally, the issue of contested identity was explored.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGION: THE ANCHOR OF SELF-IDENTITY AND BELONGING

General Considerations

The format of the previous chapter will be continued for this section. Each topic will be introduced, quotes from the respondent(s) will follow, and then a discussion of the findings will be provided. In this chapter the role of adherence to the Ismaili faith will be explored. The meaning of an Ismaili identity for the respondents is studied, as well as the importance of Ismaili identity in terms of spiritual and secular matters. Mosques are discussed as a site where religious and cultural practices are reinforced and substantiated. The concept of home is explored, as the concept relates to transnationals, such as the respondents to this study. Lastly, the experience of being part of a diaspora is considered. The possibility that diaspora identity may lead to strong adaptive skills is raised.

Religion and Being

The respondents on the whole stated that the core of their identity is based on being an Ismaili Muslim. Their religion was cited as the single most influential factor in their sense of who they are and the values that they live by. Ismailis are found in seventy-five different countries, the respondents do not identify a single country as being more representative of their religion. Their religious culture, customs and rituals are transported

with them regardless of where they have settled. In a sense, their religious identity provides an anchor that is separate from a specific geographical location. Perhaps it is due in part to their diaspora experience that their religion plays an integral role in their identity. The following encompass the value the respondents ascribe to their religion and the essential role it plays in their day-to-day lives:

Amina states:

I volunteer a lot within the community. I've got my children involved in it so at least they get that kind of security from the Ismaili community. And I think it's a blessing now at my age I look at it and I think it's a wonderful blessing that we have a centre to go to every evening that there are occasions that you can celebrate as we meet. And I think that there is a very strong sense of identity that I hold, I think that that's what is giving me my roots, my base, and my security blanket.

Shirin born in Burundi, currently living in Montreal with two children explains:

My religion is very important to me. For my husband and I it is important that our kids get a strong base. Since they were born they went to religion classes. You have to practice you can't just leave it in your life you don't have anything to belong to. You have to hold on to something to be able to survive and succeed and it is a part of daily life for us because they learn their prayers we have to say it every night and in the morning it's a part of

your daily life. I find when we go to the Mosque we see our own people. You practice our own religion and another thing is even our social gatherings are with the same people most of the time. We have religious festivities and the kids grow up with that they see all these things until at least eighteen in their life. After that they have to decide. But it's really part of our life. The religion is really important. It is important that we are able to practice our religion safely.

Zeitune:

My religion is a way of life for me. It gives me a sense of belonging, really an anchor. It gives me other things to do besides religion, it's an anchor, there are social activities, volunteering activities, it gives me personal satisfaction, the position that I hold besides of course some spiritual happiness as well. In terms of belonging, I feel a kind of inroads that through our religion, through the community that we are making and helping people it makes me feel good to be one of them to help those who are less fortunate. I think our religion teaches us the morals, the ethics. My children are in their teens, religion was very important. Religion is a way of life, part of the things we do. We go to the mosque, it provides the religious aspect in the community and also the social environment. It was important to pass that on to them and the traditions that came with that because we do a lot of things as part of the community and it is not always religious based. It is more traditional, the traditions came from the Indian

culture, the Islamic culture, and within that we were aware of that environment focused on traditions

Parveen:

A major influence is my religious identity, being Ismaili. Being an Ismaili there are values that I grew up with, the culture, the religion, the traditions play a big role but I think that it's primarily the interpretation of our religion where you have to be more open, where openness is a good thing. Openness to modernity not to fundamentalism, openness to new things, to new cultures. I would say that our legacy is what we came with when we came to Canada. I felt when we came to Canada was our education and our values we had a very solid education back in Kenya because it was, it was promoted heavily within our community that the girls must be educated as much as the boys. We must promote girls, be sure they are educated to the highest level also and our values which came based both on religion and from our original Indian origins.

Ismailism is providing the respondents with more than spiritual or religious guidance. It is providing values and edicts for living their lives. Much of the socialising that the respondents engage in involves others from their community. This may be explained in part by the fact that they often were friends prior to immigrating to Canada, the relationships continued upon arrival. The other aspect to this is that there are frequent religious activities, mosque ceremonies are held in the evenings and this conflicts with

the schedules of their non-Ismaili peers. There is also a social component to the mosque which is also called a community centre, so socialising is held most often with those of the same faith, though not exclusively. The respondents have created an environment here in Canada that is strikingly similar to the one in Africa at least in terms of their links to their community. Their religious identity is fulfilling spiritual, social, and practical needs. Many of the respondents expressed gaining a greater part of their sense of belonging in Canada through their links with the Ismaili community. Nader originally immigrated to British Columbia and later moved to Texas, his story underlines the importance of the Ismaili community to his family:

I liked Texas because I was from Uganda and we used to watch this movie with John Wayne in Armarillo. It was my dream to live in Texas so I went to Texas. I like the USA, I find the people are friendlier. They are very courteous. In Texas you walk into any department store and they welcome you. I like America because the people are very courteous. You go to a convenience store they will say hi be with you in a moment or call me if you need something, if you are looking around here no. My children were growing up and we are very close to our community and our religion, there was no mosque or anything so I said I don't want to bring my children up in that environment. I rather move back to Canada. So in 1981 we returned.

Now that his children are adults he is planning to return to the States. The respondents with children underlined the importance of introducing them to the religion, giving them something to belong to so to speak. The question may be raised what constitutes Ismaili culture or identity? It is clearly not linked to a specific country, yet some respondents like Parveen mentioned that there are overlaps between Ismaili customs and their Indian origins. The question was in fact posed to one of my respondents in his capacity as a community organiser for a cultural event. Moez's rendition bears repeating:

We invited the Ukrainians, the Chinese and the Japanese and we visited them and said if you have a dance representative of your culture, we would like you to participate. We invited the minister of culture at that time she sent a representative we had a Quebecois dance too. We as a community were supposed to present our dance too. And it raised a big debate and discussion in the community which dance would be representative. Any person with this kind of colour you are supposed to be Indian. I spoke to some Jamaicans who are very Indian like me but they don't speak the language, they are not Ismaili. So we had a meeting actually it was very interesting we said what is our culture? And the conclusion we came to was that Ismailis as a religious group do not have any one culture they have a number of cultures because their culture is based on the countries of their origins. So every year when we have our community functions as opposed to having only the East African dance, we also have the Indian stick dance if you go to India or Pakistan you will find that this dance goes

way back for ages. It has become a traditional dance over many years, generations so this question as to what kind of a dance were we going to perform at this multicultural folk dance festival was difficult. There were a number of suggestions. It was a very tricky question because we posed the question to the higher leaders in the community “when you go to present yourself to the outside world and they ask you to present your culture or dance how do you represent yourself?” They said that is a very tricky question because we have people coming from different countries and the countries where they come from is the culture that they represent. So now beside the traditional stick dance they allow the people from Syria who have their own Arabic dance which is very different, they perform their dance and people join in and try to imitate them and make them feel they are part of the celebration and then and there are the Afghans that have another way of dance that they perform and there are groups and they come on the stage and perform and people accept and appreciate all these different cultures. So at this Multicultural Folk Dance Festival we decided that this dance would be Indian and it would also be African and it would basically trace the history of our origins from the Indian subcontinent where the Indian stick dance was for many years. It was incorporated as part of the dance but then we lived a number of years in Africa. Africa’s traditional dance is more of a jumping type with different kinds of motions. In that dance we had our orchestra compose special music for that particular dance, a soft kind of introduction, then jumped to a more

African way of doing things then at the end it switched to Quebecois, then we came to Canada, we are now living in Quebec and the Quebecois have their own folkloric dances so it twisted, so it was like three dances in one with different background music. It was kind of a mix and it brought some criticism from some members of the community, they said your dance was great we enjoyed it but it was a hodgepodge, it was too much of a mixture.

The complexity of Ismaili identity is touched upon in this passage. It is clear that there is no single representation of Ismaili identity, and that regardless of the path one chooses to take to try to represent it there will always be those who will disagree. I believe that this introduces the very personal and contested sides of identity construction. This personal aspect is kept below the surface so to speak until confronted with a symbolic representation of one's identity. At this point, one may either agree or disagree but it is a point where one must confront one's own conception of identity, a very personal event. An ideal representation does not exist, in the same way that Alta was asked to wear her traditional costume, the Ismaili community in Montreal was forced to try to represent a complex identity into a specific symbolic representation that will necessarily always fail at least from a personal perspective. The response of community members illustrates the importance that is placed upon their religious identity, the weight that it has for their sense of self and belonging. What constitutes Ismaili identity is perhaps an unanswerable question. The responses will be as diverse as those who are members of the community. It is nonetheless noteworthy that despite differing opinions on what 'being Ismaili' may

mean there are fundamental existential needs that are met for the members regardless of one's interpretation.

The Mosque as a Cultural Site

The cases of my respondents seem to support Karen Fog Olwig's views regarding cultural sites. A key 'cultural site' for my respondents is the mosque. Members of a minority Muslim sect, and minorities within Canadian society generally, they seek sources of identity confirmation. The mosques take on a particularly important significance not only as a place of worship but as a site where cultural and religious practices are substantiated. Truly interstitial in nature, the mosques are found world-wide

The 'community' spans almost every nation-state, though the ability to worship without persecution varies from one place to another. This has influenced migration in as much as Canada was selected as a destination not simply because Canada was accepting immigrants, but more importantly, it was a destination where they could practice their religion without fear of prosecution. Their religion as a source of identity confirmation is infused with political struggle. Expressing their identity as Ismailis is, consequently, very dependent on where they are situated. And while I have mentioned that the mosque is a site of cultural substantiation, it must be noted that this is so not only because members are often of Indian origins, but interestingly because some are not. Ismailis are from various backgrounds and origins. The presence of difference as it were, intensifies the bonds between those of similar cultures and origins within the cultural site just as it does in day-to-day interactions 'on the outside'.

All of my respondents reported being very involved with events in their community through the mosque. While all had non-Ismaili friends, the closest friends tended to be Ismaili and from the same regions in Africa. The division plays out at the mosque with groups divided along linguistic lines, despite the fact that all respondents spoke Katchi, a Gujarati dialect. Respondents tended to speak English if they were from a British colony and French for those raised in a Belgian colony. The French and English influence affected their social groupings. The impact of alternate cultures on their own Indian background is noteworthy. Schooling often took place in systems set up by colonisers or in some cases teachers were trained in England and Belgium. My respondents were instructed in the ways and customs of places far from Africa, on African soil. Social groupings were formed with classmates that persisted upon immigration to Canada, the division along linguistic lines had a very practical effect on the province immigrants chose to settle in, though not exclusively, i.e. French speakers moved to Quebec, and English speakers to Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta. Despite these divisions, it should be noted that all of the respondents spoke a minimum of four languages. Their ability to speak many languages has facilitated communication at the mosque, Zul explains:

Oh at the mosque you see it keeps on switching from English to French to Katchi to Gujarati to Urdu. It depends who you are speaking to. It keeps on moving because you know people, Katchi speaking people are there, Gujarati speaking people are there then people will speak English and

there are the Francophones who speak French only and there are people from Pakistan, there they would prefer to talk to me in Urdu. So it's just a matter of switching from one language to another, there's no big deal. I belong to the Ismaili community, I am a member there. I am a born member there. It's a very solid part and parcel of my community.

The sense of community that respondents have regarding their participation at the mosque is filling an important need in their lives. Imran describes why participation at the mosque is important for him:

I can retain part of my Indian heritage, my Indian culture because I still speak the language (Katchi) with friends. I participate in some of the social side, but I can't say the same for my children, and this is why for many of us, we would like to impress upon our children, in terms of culture, food, social activity, movies, Indian cultures, they are a part of that heritage. I think the greatest asset for us in terms of retaining part of that culture is the sense of the Ismaili community. I think more than anything else it is religion that binds us, and takes us back to the culture to the heritage, because communities started from India, and that's where conversion took place. Even for my children now, if it had not been for the religion for our sense of community, probably they would have lost that whatever cultural heritage I had carried with me. There is a focal point, where you get together and be a part of yourself and see where your roots are. I think for

us, for my community probably it much more in this country a position, that we are strong here. It is a way of life for many of the people; we retain our roots, what the community has to offer.

The importance of participating at mosque social and religious events is clear in Imran's quote. The cultural, social and religious needs met at this cultural site are numerous. The mosque is a site where members of the Ismaili community may go to substantiate their religious and cultural practices. In the case of the respondents, they are a minority in Canada, for a minority, cultural sites like the mosque take on a particular significance that it might not have were they part of a majority. Participating at the mosque helps to reinforce their sense of identity through cultural and religious substantiation as well as providing a sense of belonging. Despite the fact that Ismailis are in 75 different countries, they are always a minority. Mosques provide a place to feel 'at home', a place where one belongs based solely on religious affiliation. With this in mind it becomes clearer why their religion plays a defining factor in the identity of the respondents, as a diaspora it is their religious practices that have played a central role in maintaining a sense of community regardless of where they were.

Home: Place or State of Mind?

Members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora that I have interviewed do not consider either Africa or India as home. All but one have never lived in India or Pakistan, and so, it is not surprising that they would not consider either to be 'home'. All have resided in various countries in Africa, i.e. Zaire, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, in some

instances holding citizenship, yet do not consider Africa to be home. When we consider the nature of the interactions and the reasons for migration that existed during their time in Africa, it becomes clear why they do not consider Africa 'home'. From a social interaction standpoint, there were divisions in their country of birth. Faride explains: "We were considered as the 'Asian people', the 'Asian people' mostly ran the country after the British left." There were significant social, economic, and cultural differences between the two groups. East and Central African-Asians ('the Asian people') were not considered African by black Africans. The distinction explains in part, why they do not continue to consider the African countries in which they once resided to be 'home'. Challenges were present to their identity and their role as part of African societies in terms of belonging. Born in African countries, at times refused citizenship, exclusion was part of daily life with very serious repercussions for their well being in certain instances. This is evident not least in the case of Uganda where 'non-Ugandans' were given thirty days to leave the country during Idi Amin's rule. Embracing the country of ones cultural origins for a sense of belonging is understandable in such contexts. Considered as foreigners in their country of birth led to innovative ways to define their identity and role in society.

Canada for my respondents represents the country of their hopes 'le pays d'avenir' that they sought so strongly when escaping uncertain futures in Africa. Africa, the land where they were born is described often as a place of transience. Some respondents had spent only a few short years in their place of birth, then were sent to study abroad generally in the west. Even those who lived and studied in Africa relate that they rarely felt secure,

viscerally or emotionally while living there. They felt different from black Africans, considered “Africa more or less home, we were after all, *living* there” Arzina explains. Africa as home did not persist after migrating to Canada, and was not terribly strong to begin with “home in the sense that we had no other choice.” Home as where “one best knows oneself” as suggested by Rapport and Dawson seems to be a much better formulation, specifically in reference to my respondents. Upon asking Faride where home is and why he responds:

I came to Canada at the age of seventeen. I found a job, no problem at all, started working in a factory, and it was just great. I think at that point in time is when I discovered myself as a person. I started to learn things on my own, and working...In terms of the mind opening up, and in terms of seeing other people as they were, knowing the world as it is today.

Faori chooses Montreal as home and justifies it by pointing out that Montreal is where she first had real freedom, lived out her adolescence. Arzina cites Canada as home having lived in Canada for twenty-five years, arriving at the age of eighteen, she notes that she became more independent as a woman in Canada.

The respondents have fought and negotiated their identity in Canada longer than any other place. The overriding comment however regards independence and freedom, ‘knowing the world’. My respondents lived out important years in the course of their personal development in Canada. Canada in that sense is the place where they learned who they

were. Their sense of who they are has been forged in Canada. Who they are on an intimate personal level, and who they are in terms of origins, and where they have been. Canada is the place where the multiple influences of their lives became manifest in day-to-day actions. At the same time, the way of life in Canada became an intricate part of who they are.

There are other factors that enter into the respondents meaning of home. At times respondents mentioned that a main defining factor for their sense of home is the location of their families. Family bonds are described as very strong, and being with one's loved ones regardless of location was requisite to naming a specific place as home.

Laila explains:

I felt comfortable when my family was there [Africa]. But once we all moved out I didn't have any bond with that country at all, because it was not home. It was home when my parents and my family was there but once my family moved out I wasn't attached to the country. The relationship was with the family.

Parveen's explanation of the shifting of home based upon her parents location is telling:

It took me a long time to say home is Montreal. I think it's probably in '96 after my Mom passed away I went back home and wrapped up everything because my Dad was also going to move to Canada. Now there is no place to go to. I guess that was it since then I'd say Montreal is my home, when Dad moved here. Before this each time I returned to Africa to visit I would say I'm going home to visit. I lived there all my life; I grew up there so that was home.

A number of respondents expressed as Parveen did that they had ties to Africa for a short time after leaving. Zul's narrative brings this issue into focus:

Where is home? You know that's an interesting question because when you're new here you always have that thing of back at home. So at first for a little while, I went through that syndrome of back at home syndrome until one day it dawned on me that there's no back at home. It was too dangerous to return and everything had changed. The day I realised this my back at home syndrome dissolved. So now, there is no home for me except Canada. I don't have any other country except Canada period. This is my home I know of no other country. That question is very simple it's a one-word question, Canada.

Amina suggests:

This is home for me now. There was a time when I used to say I want to go back home to Uganda. You always miss home and it was very hard to survive here. I was isolated because there was nobody around me. I missed my own, my family I missed everything about myself. But I think I found my comfort in Canada and my own children are born here now and therefore this is really home. Canada is my home now. I think it changed after realising that there is no possibility of going back home. Nothing is left there anymore there's always this neat feeling of saying look I want to go back home and there are a lot of people who going home realise that it is not what they had left behind. They have come back and told us stories about it. How our own little houses are destroyed, how our schools are destroyed, how the mosque is gone. And then you realise that all those things are gone, there is nothing left to go back home to. And therefore I have come to the conclusion that really home is what you make of when you arrive at a certain destination. So I have decided that this is going to be home and I am going to create that kind of a home here.

There are a number of issues raised in these passages. First and foremost it is the coming to terms that the respondents arrived at once they realised that Africa could no longer be home for them. Their new site, namely Canada became home almost by default. Yet now, after many years, the respondents are comfortable and quite certain that Canada is home

for them. Additionally, Amina's decision to create a home here speaks to the symbolic nature of home, one that is less place dependant and more in tune with creating an environment where one feels comfortable and where one has a sense of belonging. The sense of belonging is partially tied to relationships with family members and friends, tied to the ability to live their lives according to the cultural and religious traditions that are important to their sense of identity. It is clear that when we consider this notion of home that it is not place dependant which is not to say that location is irrelevant; on the contrary an accepting and tolerant environment is requisite for living one's life free to 'create home'.

Diaspora Identity as Evolutionary

The experience of moving to new places, settling and moving on repeatedly has honed the respondents' abilities to adapt to new environments, in tandem with this ability is a sense of confidence with regard to relocating should the need arise. The respondents are quite clear about the characteristics that enable them to adapt and freely shared their views during the course of the interview. The ability of the respondents to adapt to diverse environments has amplified their self-confidence in terms of possible future migrations as evidenced by the following excerpts.

Amina explains:

My attitude has helped me to blend in well. The openness that you need in a new country, the openness you need in accepting people and their values.

I think my religious background has also helped me to be generous, not just generous in sense of material things but generous in accepting people of different cultures. I had to do that myself first before I could be accepted you know. And I find instead of imposing my value system on others and feeling, I look for commonalities more things that are common amongst people and that's what's helping me.

Faori notes: "Though we would not want to go back to Africa to live, just maybe to visit, if we had to we would integrate if we had to after changing from continent to continent we are very used to it now." These are views repeated consistently by all of the respondents. They believe they are open minded, open to change, and different environments. Likewise, they expressed that having adapted to so many places, the concept of moving is not worrisome.

Shirin explains how their history has contributed to their ability to live in diverse countries:

I think all our life we were immigrants anywhere we went. For us its not something that would bother you, you get used to living like that and especially for somebody who has never been to India it's not part of my life either. I don't even know what is. I hope to go one day but it's not really essential because we continue practising our culture at home. But here [in Canada] you feel quite accepted; you feel you are a part of it. You

can say right away to anybody you are a Canadian and they'll just ask you which background, that's it. It's not more than that. Here everybody accepts your colour and even if you say you are Canadian, they always say Canadians there are so many different types of Canadians from different backgrounds and they are all positive about it.

When I raised the possibility of returning to Africa most did not want to return to live yet felt certain that if they did go back to live there they would manage, adapt. All of the respondents expressed being very happy in Canada, none wanted to move to another country. Canada was selected as a destination primarily because Canada was accepting newcomers at the time they needed to leave Africa, many also had relatives living in Canada who were willing to sponsor them. A theme that emerged throughout the interviews was that the respondents collectively felt they belonged in Canada. This was specifically related to Canada's immigration policy that has resulted in Canada being composed primarily of people who were at one point either personally or ancestrally from another country. The respondents allied themselves with Canadians of all nationalities as part of 'the land of immigrants'; Zeitune's quote illustrates this concept succinctly:

Canada is so diverse it's more accepting of other people from different cultural ethnic origins very few people that have that common thread you know you are a Canadian. What is a true Canadian? I am a Canadian. I feel a Canadian but I am a Canadian of ethnic origins for me just like all the other Canadians who live in Canada. There is no true Canadian.

Moez born in Uganda and currently living in Montreal echoes Zeitune's viewpoint: "Being Canadian is not just being white you can be a Canadian of any colour or and uh you can be accepted as a Canadian citizen because Canada is made up of immigrants." Canada is a place where the respondents feel they belong not only as part of their own community, the part within the whole, but also as part of the larger Canadian population as fellow immigrants. All of the respondents expressed that they appreciate Canada in part because they are able to practice their religion and because the country is safe. While living in Africa, the respondents were in a constant state of unease. It is perhaps for this reason that the safety afforded in Canada is so important to them at this point in their lives. Many respondents voiced their appreciation for Canada as a democratic society, one where they can be themselves with little fear of reprisal. The respondents compared Canada with other countries they had lived in and unanimously chose Canada as the best place to be to live their lives. Imran notes the challenges with living in Canada and the manner that he deals with them:

When I see my children, here in Canada, we speak mostly in English at home. Except for at a very early age, you have this inkling that you have to teach them your Mother tongue, but then when you are exposed to a wider society, it becomes imperative that you have the language of the majority. Back home in Uganda, there was not so much of a dilemma, because the community was much larger, less of the British influence there in that sense, as opposed to here. Here with the western way of life, many of us

want to retain part of the Indian culture, by on occasions, dressing up in Indian costumes, going to the mosque, or taking part in social functions that have Indian backgrounds, or going to see Indian films, or videos. I guess in a sense that you want to retain part of the heritage of yours, without having to adopt a completely new way of life, a North American way of life. For the Indian community or for a minority group, that is always the dilemma. We have our own ethnic television station, that only appears once a week, I like to catch it to see what is current, what is happening in the Indian film industry, or Indian politics, or life. We go to internet, there is more opportunity now, but I don't think we can totally identify ourselves in that sense, you are just hanging on to the threads, and you realise that you are living in a society where you have to take the advantages from both of the cultures.

The situational nature of identity construction and cultural practices are well illustrated in these passages. The threads Imran refers to indicate his Indian background that he maintains as well as he can in a western setting. The key is that he attempts to glean whatever positive aspects of western culture he can to improve his way of life. The advantage Imran has over those who have always resided in the same place is that he has been exposed to many different cultures and systems, each with its advantages and disadvantages. He has as a result, had the opportunity to gather the habits and practices that he has found useful, and at the same time he has learned to adapt to many different settings. A common thread remains, maximising the benefits from one's cultural

repertoire the larger the repertoire the more likely one is to deal well with new challenges. Getting the best of all worlds is an important characteristic of diaspora identity that promotes adaptation to new places and enhances self-confidence.

This chapter has examined the integral role that the Ismaili faith plays in lives of the respondents. Ismaili identity was explored in a fashion that permitted a consideration of various perspectives of what constitutes such an identity. The importance of mosques, for the respondents, as a site where religious, cultural and social needs are met was also discussed. The varied meanings of home for the respondents were outlined. Finally, the notion that the experience of a diaspora existence may lead to strong adaptive skills was raised with an emphasis on the varied cultures, ideas, and ways of living that members of a diaspora encounter, and then, may draw upon in the course of their lives.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

I have argued that a deterritorialized view of identity construction and belonging is the most effective way to study members of the East and Central African-Asian diaspora. They are, in a non-traditional sense transnationals. Conventional notions of transnationals infer a country of origin and one of settlement. I have shown that at least for the respondents of this study, 'origin' in and of itself is ambivalent. Origins may be linked to India, a country in which they may never have lived, or to their place of birth in Africa. Connections, social, political, and economic of the respondents span many borders. A rethinking of place and space has enabled a broader conception of transnationalism, one that transcends territory as a defining factor, one that recognises the role that imagined communities play in the construction of identity and belonging.

Identity construction and reconstruction among the respondents of this study illustrates the fluid and complex nature of identity. Without exception, all believe that their identity is a mixture, layered, as suggested by Iqbal. The aspects of their identity that the respondents choose to emphasise depends in great part to where they are at a given time. Parveen, for example, stressed that she was Indian while living in Africa, and Kenyan in Canada. Social and political forces influence how identity is portrayed as evidenced by East African respondents who wore exclusively western style clothing in Africa yet wear Indian traditional clothing at times in Canada. What became clear is that the respondents

have a diverse background; speaking a minimum of four languages and as many as eight. Their cultural, social and economic practices encompass Indian, African, European, and North American influences. The respondents have illustrated the ability to adapt to numerous environments and believe that they could adapt and meet challenges of a new country should the need arise. Respondents who experienced multiple migrations in Africa tended to follow a similar pattern upon immigrating to Canada as evidenced by Nader who is currently planning to move to America.

Identity construction and reconstruction among Central and East African-Asians of the diaspora is illustrative of divorce of place as a physical location and social categories of identification. Geography is increasingly disconnected from identity, where one lives is not a priori feature of self-description. This is most evident when one 'returns' to the site of origins. There is a deterritorialized identity, 'returning' to India increases the tensions between place and social categories, resistance from local populations is direct. This was evidenced in the manner that respondents were received in India and Pakistan, specifically "like Indian tourists returning home." The reaction of respondents to their reception varied. Some, like Iqbal, felt that despite being called an outsider by local inhabitants, he was still a part of them, part of what it means to be Indian. Others, like Faori believe that she is Indian despite claims to the contrary by Indians while in India. Faori reconciles the discrepancy by calling herself and others from Africa of Indian origins "imported Indians", suggesting simultaneously that as imported Indians they have more than one perspective to offer. The overwhelming consensus among respondents is that their identity is best described as multiple, a hybrid of many cultures and beliefs. The

Ismaili identity was cited as the defining, or principle layer of identity. The ability of members of Central and East African-Asians of the diaspora to negotiate and renegotiate their identity when faced with oppressive dynamics, as was the case for respondents from Uganda, speaks to their strong sense of self. Their strong sense of self is rooted in part, in their faith as Ismaili Muslims. Their sense of belonging is based fundamentally on their membership in the Ismaili community. The community has significance from a real and imagined perspective. Real in terms of affiliation with fellow members in Canada, and imagined as part of a greater Ismaili community world-wide. Amina's statement that "[religion] is giving me my roots, my base, my security blanket" speaks to the a priori role that adherence to the Ismaili faith plays in the lives of the respondents.

Respondents chose to leave Africa for similar reasons. Pressures, both direct and indirect, were placed on African-Asians specifically in the late sixties and early seventies. The future for African-Asians in Africa was not promising and their safety was not guaranteed. At the time of their migration, Canada was accepting Ugandan refugees, and others from East and Central Africa as landed immigrants. The religious leaders of their community recommended Canada as a destination, and this influenced their decision to emigrate. As Ismaili communities grew in Canada members recreated the lives they had in Africa, at least from a social and religious perspective. There were changes but fundamentally the organisational structure, social and religious, of the Ismaili community was built and grew as the population increased. Respondents expressed having friends from outside their religious community, but the majority are from within. More specifically, many of their friends tend to be from the same areas in Africa in which they

once lived, This is not surprising given that they were sometimes friends before arriving in Canada, and have a great deal in common.

Experiences in Africa are important for all of the respondents regardless of how or why they eventually left. Some, like Alta, are profoundly attached to Africa as a place through their memories, as she expressed when describing her childhood, "I tasted the land with my spirit". While Alta recognises the special place Africa holds in her heart she also concedes that she is unable to return and live as she once did as her experiences of living in North America has changed her way of looking at the world. One, in this sense, may never truly return. Other respondents like Zul, are hesitant to return to Africa as they prefer to protect their childhood memories. The rupture experienced by some respondents who were forced out of Uganda during Idi Amin Dada's rule has resulted in a desire to return, to attain closure, to leave on their own terms. The regions of Africa in which the respondents once lived continue to be important; this may be contrasted to India. India represents the site of cultural practices and traditions but as a place it does not have the same status as Africa. This was evidenced by Iqbal's narrative of his visit to India where he felt little or no emotional reaction, contrasted to Africa where, he notes, "the minute I got off the plane I had a lump in my throat".

The situational nature of identity construction became salient during the exploration of the role that Africa has played and plays in the construction of the respondents' identity. Some of the respondents Amina, for example, believes that her experiences in Africa have resulted in being more open-minded compared with Indians from India. She

attributes this in part to western influences in Africa. The colonial regimes in East and Central Africa lent legitimacy to the Asian community. While living under British rule, Imran was taught in a British educational system. Imran expressed that at that time England represented a home country, indicating the depth of influence that the British had. The decision not to wear Indian style clothing while in Africa illustrates the degree to which respondents desired to be aligned with the ruling classes. Respondents note that the exposure to western ideas and culture in Africa assisted their adaptation upon immigration to Canada.

The concept of home was one that seemed to interest the respondents as evidenced by their detailed discussion of the shifting of home when they first left Africa. This was quite pronounced in respondents from Uganda; no doubt a reaction to the violent way in which they were forced to leave. Uganda was referred to as home for the Ugandan respondents during their first years in Canada. They related that after hearing of the destruction of their homes and schools they realised that there was no longer a home to return to and gradually they began, in the words of Amina, "to create a home here". Other respondents suggested that home is where their family is so may change accordingly. The majority, however, have expressed that Canada is now home not least because they have been living here for twenty-five years on average.

All of the respondents reported feeling accepted in Canada by the general population. They attribute this to the fact that they make an effort to make others comfortable in their presence. By accepting others, being non-judgemental, they receive the same in return, at

least in most cases. They also note that they feel part of Canadian society as part of “a land of immigrants”. The respondents also note that they believe they are liberal and open-minded; they believe that this is integral to their ability to adapt to new environments. They have a history of migration personally and ancestrally; they are willing to migrate in the future if the need should arise and are confident that they can succeed. The respondents, without exception were very detailed in describing their identity, careful to include each aspect i.e. Shia Imami Ismaili Muslim of Indian origins born in Uganda. Respondents explained that it is important to them that those they meet understand that they have much to offer, experiences and ideas from many places and cultural systems. They note that they have grown in Canada, and continue to seek new experiences and opportunities. East and Central African-Asians who participated in this study are attempting to fuse their knowledge and experience in a fashion that permits them to “get the best from both worlds” in the process.

This study has provided an in-depth examination of identity construction and maintenance for a small sample of the Khoja Ismaili community in Canada. Given the emphasis the respondents have placed upon their Ismaili faith as a defining aspect of their sense of self, and how they live their lives, it would be fruitful to examine what Ismaili identity represents cross-culturally. Moez’s rendition of his attempts to organise a dance that was illustrative of the Ismaili community in Quebec speaks to the various opinions on what constitutes an Ismaili identity. Community members complained that the dance was “a hodgepodge, too much of a mixture”. Given that Ismailis live in over seventy-five

countries, the possibilities for the construction of Ismaili identity promise to be diverse and are fertile ground for future research.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Name
Date of Birth
Place of birth
Citizenship(s)
Birth place of parents
Citizenship of parents

Grandparents place of birth and citizenship

Can you give me an idea and time frame of your movement in terms of travel / places you have lived since birth.

P. Ages

P. Why leave each place?

P. Were you accepted in these places?

P. What gave you this impression? Examples

P. Did you feel you belonged?

P. Why/not? Examples

Where is home for you? Has this changed over time?

P. What is it about the place named that gives you the impression that it is home?

P. Have you been back? (in the case of someone not born here, or names a place other than Canada as home)

P. Were you accepted?

P. Examples

P. Would you live there again if you could?

P. Why/why not?

How would you describe yourself?

P. You have lived in many places, why describe yourself in this way?

How would you define your identity?

P. Why in this way?

P. Is there an overriding characteristic?

P. Would you respond this way in different countries?

P. How? Examples

If identify with India/Pakistan/Africa-ever returned?

P. Response of those living there?

P. How did you feel about that?

Do you wear clothing in Canada that you identify with another place i.e. India?

P. Examples

P. When/how often?

P. Why?

Do you wear clothing in India/Pakistan/Africa that you identify with another place? i.e. Canada?

P. Examples

P. When/how often?

P. Why?

Do you eat food in Canada that you identify with another place?

Do you eat food in Pakistan/India/Africa that you identify with another place?

P. Examples

P. Why?

Are you ever asked your nationality in Canada?

P. How do you respond?

P. What is the reaction of those asking? Examples

P. How do you feel about that?

P. How do you 'deal with it'?

Do you feel accepted by native born Canadians?

P. Why?/not? Examples

Where/when do feel you belong?(specific sites?)

P. What happens there or why do you feel you belong?

Who do you associate the most with here?

P. Who are your friends?

P. What brings you together?

Are there groups you prefer not to associate with?

P. Why?

Are there groups who prefer not to associate with you here?

P. What gives you this impression?

P. Which ones?

P. How do you feel about this?

Who did you associate the most with in other regions you have lived?

P. What brought you together?

P. Were there groups you preferred not to associate with there?

P. Why?

Were there groups who preferred not to associate with you there?

P. What gave you this impression? Examples

P. How did/do you feel about this?

What would you say are the influences on the way that you have, and currently live?

P. Examples

In what ways do you think you have changed?

P. Examples

Do you know or associate with people from East/Central Africa? Examples

P. How do you maintain contact?

P. How often?

P. Do you identify with them?

P. In what ways do you consider yourself to be similar? Different?

Do you have contacts with family in other countries?

P. Which countries?

P. How do you maintain contact?

P. How often?

What languages do you speak?

P. With whom?

P. Which language do you use the most?

Anything you would like to add?

Thank you